JOSEPH BRODSKY: HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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An Interview with Amos Oz

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The Morality of Ballet

Fiction

Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

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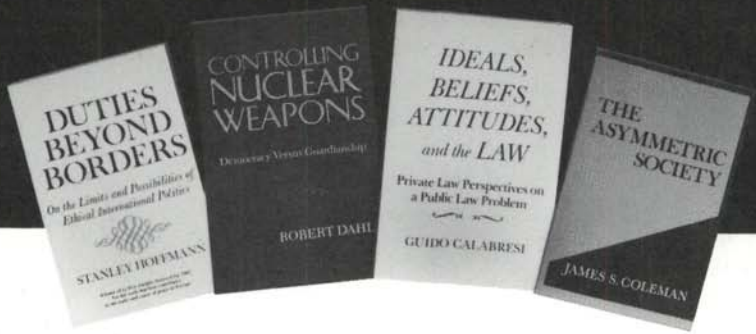
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PR3 1986–VOLUME LIII NUMBER 3

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Editor's Note:

We regret the misspelling of Betty Friedan's name in "What Makes Writers Run" by Barbara Probst Solomon in PR/2, 1986, and the omission of the word "not" in William Phillips's "Comment" in PR/1, 1986. The sentence should have read, "But psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic critics have not been able to relate this observation to the quality of a work or to its other meanings, though some light has been cast on certain aspects of literature, usually on the explicit 'content'."

Cornelius Castoriadis has informed us that he feels his article, "Defending the West" (PR/3, 1984), was not accurately translated and that its meaning and tone were altered in many places.

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"They were young, Jewish, urban intellectuals...

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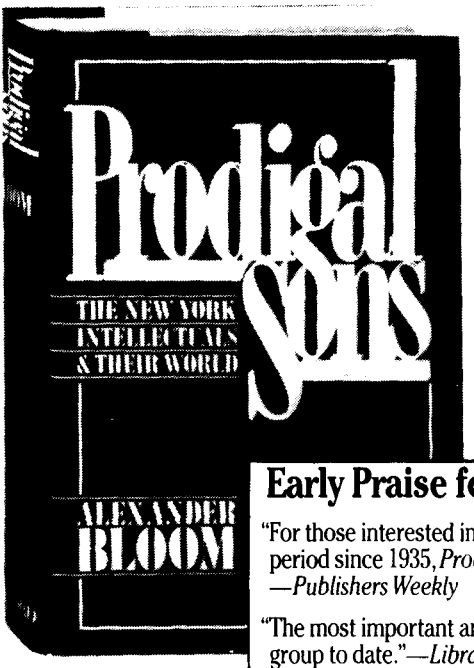

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Joseph Brodsky

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

(A Roadshow)

The Sun's in its orbit,
yet I feel morbid.

ACT I

Prologue

Ladies and gentlemen and the gay!
All ye made of sweet human clay!
Let me tell you: you are okay.

Our show is to start without much delay.
So let me inform you right away:
this is not a play but the end of the play

that has been on for some eighty years.
It received its boos and received its cheers.
It won't last for long, one fears.

Men and machines lie to rest or rust.
Nothing arrives as quick as the Past.
What we'll show you presently is the cast

of characters who have ceased to act.
Each of these lives has become a fact
from which you presumably can subtract

but to which you blissfully cannot add.
The consequences of that could be bad
for your looks or your blood

For they are the cause, you are the effect.
Because they lie flat, you are still erect.
Citizens! Don't neglect

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history! History holds the clue
to your taxes and to your flu,
to what comes out of the blue.

We'll show you battlefields, bedrooms, labs,
sinking ships and escaping subs,
cradles, weddings, divorces, slabs.

Folks! The curtain's about to rise!
What you'll see won't look like a Paradise.
Still, the Past may moisten a pair of eyes,

for its prices were lower than our sales,
for it was ruining cities: not blood cells;
for on the horizon it's not taut sails

but the wind that fails.

1900. A quiet year, you bet.
True: none of you is alive as yet.
The '00' stands for the lack of you.
Still, things are happening, quite a few.
In China, the Boxers are smashing whites.
In Russia, A. P. Chekhov writes.
In Italy, Floria Tosca screams.
Freud, in Vienna, interprets dreams.
The Impressionists paint, Rodin still sculpts.
In Africa, Boers grab the British scalps
or vice versa (who cares, my dear?).
And McKinley is re-elected here.
There are four great empires, three good democracies.
The rest of the world sports loin-cloths and moccasins,
speaking both figuratively and literally.
Upstaging "Umberto's" in Little Italy,
in the big one Umberto the Ist's shot dead.
(Not all that's written on walls is read.)
And marking the century's real turn,
Friedrich Nietzsche dies, Louis Armstrong's born
to refute the great Kraut's unholy
"God is dead" with "Hello, Dolly."

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The man of the year, though, is an engineer.
John Browning is his name.
He's patented something. So let us hear
about John's claim to fame.

(John Moses Browning)

"I looked at the calendar, and I saw
that there are a hundred years to go.
That made me a little nervous
for I thought of my neighbors.
I've multiplied them one hundred times:
it came to them being all over!
So I went to my study that looks out on limes
and invented this cute revolver!"

1901. A swell, modest time.
A T-bone steak is about a dime.
Queen Victoria dies; but then Australia
repeats her silhouette and, *inter alia*,
joins the Commonwealth. In the humid woods
Of Tahiti, Gauguin paints his swarthy nudes.
In China, the Boxers take the rap.
Max Planck in his lab (not on his lap
yet) is studying radiation.
Verdi dies too. But our proud nation,
represented by Mrs. Disney, awards the world
with a kid by the name of Walt
who'll animate the screen. Off screen,
the British launch their first submarine.
But it's a cake-walk or a Strindberg play
or Freud's "Psychopathology of Everyday
Life" that really are not to be missed!
And McKinley's shot dead by an anarchist.

The man of the year is Signore Marconi.
He is an Italian, a Roman.
His name prophetically rhymes with "Sony":
they have a few things in common.

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(Guglielmo Marconi)

"In a Catholic country where the sky is blue
and clouds look like cherubs' vestiges,
one daily receives through the air a few
wordless but clear messages.
Regular speech has its boring spoils:
it leads to more speech, to violence,
it looks like spaghetti, it also coils.
That's why I've built the wireless!"

1902. Just another bland
peaceful year. They dissect a gland
and discover hormones. And a hormone
once discovered is never gone.
The Boer War (ten thousand dead) is over.
Elsewhere, kind Europeans offer
railroad chains to a noble savage.
A stork leaves a bundle in a Persian cabbage
patch, and the tag reads "Khomeini." Greeks, Serbs, Croats,
and Bulgars are at each others' throats.
Claude Monet paints bridges nevertheless.
The population of the U.S.
is approximately 76
million: all of them having sex
to affect our present rent.
Plus Teddy Roosevelt's the President.

The man of the year is Arthur Conan Doyle,
a writer. The subjects of his great toil
are a private dick and a paunchy doc;
occasionally, a dog.

(Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)

"Imagine the worst: your subconscious is
as dull as your conscience. And you, a noble
soul, grab a Luger and make Swiss cheese
out of your skull. Better take my novel
about the Hound of the Baskervilles!
It'll save a handful of your brain cells

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and beef up your dreams. For it simply kills
time and somebody else!"

1903. You may start to spy
on the future. Old Europe's sky
is a little dim. To increase its dimness,
the Krupp Works in Essen erect their chimneys.
(Thus the sense of Geld breeds the sense of guilt.)
Still, more smoke comes from London, from a smoke-filled
room where with guile and passion
Bolsheviks curse Mensheviks in Russian.
Speaking of Slavs: the Serbian King and Queen
are done by local well-wishers in.
Painters Whistler, Gauguin, Pissarro are gone.
Panama rents us its Canal Zone.
While bidding their maidens bye-bye and cheerio,
the tommies sail off to grab Nigeria
and turn it into a British colony:
to date, a nation's greatest felony
is if it's neither friend nor foe.
My father is born. So is Evelyn Waugh.

Man of the year, I am proud to say
is two men. They are brothers. Together, they
sport two heads, four legs and four hands—which brings
us to their bird's four wings.

(The Wright Brothers)

"We are Orville and Wilbur Wright.
Our name simply rhymes with 'flight'!
This may partially explain
why we decided to build a plane.
Oh there are no men in the skies, just wind!
Cities look like newspaper print.
Mountains glitter and rivers bend.
But the ultimate plane'd rather bomb than land!"

1904. Things which were in store
hit the counter. There is a war:

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Japan, ever so smiling, gnashes
teeth and bites off what, in fact, is Russia's.
Other than that, in Milan police
crack local skulls. But more common is
the touch of the new safety razor blade.
The nuances of the White Slave Trade,
Mount Ste. Victoire by Monsieur Cézanne
and other trifles under the sun
including popular French disgust
with the Vatican, are discussed
in every Parisian cafeteria.
Radioactivity—still a theory—
is stated by Rutherford (when a particle
brings you a lordship, we call it practical).
And as the first Rolls Royce engines churn,
Chekhov dies but Graham Greene is born,
so is George Balanchine, to upgrade the stage,
so too—though it's sin to disclose her age—
is Miss Dietrich, to daunt the screen.
And New York hears its subway's first horrid scream!

The man of the year is a Hottentot.
South-West Africa's where he dwells.
In a German colony. And is being taught
German. So he rebels.

(A Hottentot)

"Germans to me are extremely white.
They are white in broad daylight and what's more, at night.
Plus if you try to win minds and hearts
of locals, you don't call a black guy "schwarz"—
"Schwarz" sounds shoddy and worse than "black."
Change your language and then come back!
Fly, my arrow, and hit a Hans
to cure a Hans of his arrogance!"

1905. In the news: Japan.
Which means that the century is upon
us. Diminishing the lifespan

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of Russian dreadnoughts to nought, Japan
tells *urbi et orbi* it's loathe to lurk
in the wings of geography. In Petersburg
those whose empty stomachs churn
take to the streets. Yet they won't return
home, for the Cossacks adore long streets.
A salesman of the Singer sewing devices greets
in Latvia the arrival of yet another
daughter, who is to become my mother.
In Spain, unaware of this clever ploy,
Pablo Picasso depicts his "Boy
With Pipe" in blue. While the shades of blonde,
Swedes and Norwegians, dissolve their bond
And Norway goes independent; yet
that's not enough to turn brunette.
Speaking of things that sound rather queer,
E is equated to MC^2
by Albert Einstein, and the Fauvists
(*Les Fauves* is the French for unruly beasts)
unleash Henri Matisse in Paris.
"The Merry Widow" by Franz Lehar is
the toast of the town. Plus Transvaal gets its
constitution called by the natives "the pits."
And Greta Garbo, *La belle dame sans*
merci, is born. So are neon signs.

The man of the year, our record tells,
is neither Strindberg nor H. G. Wells,
he is not Albert Schweitzer, not Oscar Wilde:
his name is obscured by his own brain-child.

(Camouflage)

"I am what gentlemen wear in the field
when they are afraid that they may be killed.
I am called camouflage. Sporting me, each creature
feels both safer and close to Nature.
The green makes your sniper's pupil sore.
That's what forests and swamps are for.
The planet itself wears me: the design
is as French as it is divine."

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1906. Time stands at ease.
Having one letter in common with
his subject, Freud adds to our bookshelf
preparing the century for itself.
On the whole, Europeans become much nicer
to each other: in Africa. Still, the Kaiser
when asked of the growth of his navy, lies.
The Japs, for some reason, nationalize
their railroads of whose existence none,
save several spies, had known.
Along the same, so to speak cast-iron
lines, aping the rod of Aaron,
the Simplon Tunnel opens to hit your sight
with a smoking non-stop Vis-à-vis. Aside
from that, the civilized world condemns
night shifts (in factories though) for dames.
Prime ministers are leapfrogging in
Russia, as though they've seen
in a crystal ball that the future keeps
no room for these kinds of leaps.
The French Government warily says "pardon"
to Captain Dreyfus, a Jew who's done
ten years in the slammer on the charge of treason.
Still, this distinction between a prison
and a Jew has no prophetic air.
The U.S. troops have a brief affair
with the Island of Cuba: their first tête-à-tête.
Samuel Beckett is born. Paul Cézanne is dead.

The man of the year is Herr von Pirquet.
He stings like a honey-bee.
The sting screams like Prince Hamlet's sick parakeet:
TB or not TB.

(Dr. Clement von Pirquet)

"What I call allergy, you call rash.
I'll give you an analogy: each time you blush,
it shows you're too susceptible to something lurid,
obscene and antiseptical to hope to cure it.

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This, roughly, is the principle that guides my needle.
To prove you are invincible it hurts a little;
it plucks from your pale cheeks the blooming roses
and checks their petals for tuberculosis!"

As for 1907, it's neither here
nor there. But Auden is born this year!
This birth is the greatest of all prologues!
Still, Pavlov gets interested in dogs.
Next door Mendeleev, his bearded neighbor
who gave the universe the table
of its elements, slips into a coma.
The Cubists' first show, while Oklahoma
becomes the Union's 46th
state. Elsewhere New Zealand seeks
to fly the Union Jack. Lumière
develops the colored pictures ere
anyone else (we all owe it to him!)
The Roman Pope takes a rather dim
view of modernism: jealous Iago!
Having squashed (4–0) Detroit, Chicago
forever thirsting for *Gloria Mundi*
wins the World Series. In Swinemunde
Nicholas the IInd meets the German Kaiser
for a cup of tea. That, again, is neither
here nor there, like Kalamazoo.
And Carl Hagenbeck opens his cageless zoo
where walruses swim, lions pace, birds fly
proving: animals also can live a lie.

The man of the year, you won't believe,
is Joseph Stalin, then just a thief.
He is young; he is twenty-eight;
but History's there, and he cannot wait.

(Joseph Dzhugashvili, alias Stalin)

"My childhood was rotten, I lived in mud.
I hold up banks 'cause I miss my dad.
So to help the party, for all my troubles
one day I took four hundred grand in rubles.

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Thus far, it was the greatest heist
In the Russian history after Christ.
Some call me eager, some call me zealous;
I just like big figures with their crowd of zeroes."

1908 is a real bore
though it provides a new high in gore
by means of an earthquake in the Southern part
of Calabria, Italy. Still, the world of art
tries to replace those one hundred fifty
thousand victims with things as nifty
as Monet's depiction of the Ducal Palace
in Venice, or with Isadora's galas,
or with the birth of Ian Fleming: later
his books'll sell in the millions: to fill the crater.
In the World Series Chicago's again a winner.
In the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina
are taken by Austria (for what it took
it will pay somewhat later with its Archduke).
And the fountain pen is in vogue worldwide.
The gas of helium's liquified
in Holland which means the rising of
that flat country a bit above
sea level, which means thoughts vertical.
The king and the crown prince are killed in Portugal,
for horizontality's sake no doubt.
Also, the first Model T is out
in Dearborn to roam our blissful quarters
trailed by the news that General Motors
is incorporated. The English Edward
and Russia's Nicholas make an effort
to know each other aboard a yacht.
The Germans watch it but don't react—
or do, but that cannot be photographed.
And the Republic calls on William Taft.

The man of the year is a German scientist
Paul Ehrlich. He digs bacterias
and sires immunology. All the *sapiens*
owe a lot to his theories.

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(Paul Ehrlich)

"The world is essentially a community
and to syphilis, nobody has immunity.
So what I've invented beefs up your arsenal
for living a life that's a bit more personal.
I've made Salvarsan. Oh my Salvarsan!
It may cure your wife, it may cure your son,
it may cure yourself and your mistress fast.
Think of Paul Ehrlich as you pull or thrust!"

1909 trots a fine straight line.
Three Lives are published by Gertrude Stein.
(On the strength of this book, if its author vies
for the man of the year, she sure qualifies.)
Other than that, there is something murky
about the political life in Turkey:
in those parts, every man has a younger brother,
and as Sultans they love to depose each other.
The same goes apparently in Iran:
Ahmed Shah tells Mohammed Ali: "*I* run
the show," though he's 12 years old.
In Paris, Sergei Diaghilev strikes gold
with his "Ballets Russes." While in Honduras,
screaming the usual "God, endure us!"
peasants slaughter each other: it's a civil war.
Sigmund Freud crosses the waters for
to tell our Wonderland's cats and Alices
a few things about psychoanalysis.
But David Griffith of Motion Pictures,
boggling one's dreams, casts Mary Pickford.
The Brits, aping the Royal Dutch
Shell Company, too, legalize their touch
on the Persian oil. The Rockefeller
Foundation is launched to stall a failure
and to boost a genius. Leaving all the blight,
glitter and stuff made of Bakelite
(that heralds the Plastic Age) far below, the weary
bearded and valiant Captain Robert Peary
reaches the North Pole, and thus subscribes

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virginal white to the Stars and Stripes.
Ah those days when one's thoughts were glued
to this version of the Absolute!

The man of the year is the unknown
nameless hairdresser in London Town.
Stirred either by its cumulous firmament
or by the British anthem, he invents the permanent.

(A London hairdresser)

"The Sun never sets over this Empire.
Still, all empires one day expire.
They go to pieces, they get undone.
The wind of history is no fun.
Let England be England and rule the waves!
And let those waves be real raves.
Let them be dark, red, chestnut, blonde
unruffled by great events beyond!"

1910 marks the end of the first decade.
As such, it can definitely be okayed.
For there is clearly a democratic
trend. Though at times things take an erratic
turn. Like when Egypt's Prime Minister, through no fault
of his, gets murdered. But the revolt
in Albania is the work of masses
(although how they tell their oppressed from their ruling class is
anyone's guess). Plus Portugal bravely rids
itself of its king, and as he's hugged by the Brits,
becomes a republic. As for the Brits themselves,
one more generation of them learns God saves
no king, and mourning the sad demise
of Edward the Seventh, they fix their eyes
on George the Fifth. Mark Twain and Tolstoy die too.
But Karl May has just published his *Winnetou*
in German. In Paris, they've seen and heard
Stravinsky-cum-Diaghilev's "Firebird."
That causes some riot, albeit a tiny one.
Whereas the twangs of the Argentinian
Tango do to the world what the feared and hailed

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Halley's comet, thank heavens, failed
to do. And our watchful Congress
finds it illegal if not incongruous
to take ladies across state lines
for purposes it declines
to spell out, while Japan moves nearer
to Korea: a face that invades a mirror.

The man of the year is an architect.
His name is Frank Lloyd Wright.
Things that he's built still stand erect,
nay! hug what they stand on tight.

(Frank Lloyd Wright)

"Nature and space have no walls or doors,
and roaming at will is what man adores.
So, a builder of houses, I decide
to bring the outside inside.
You don't build them tall: you build them flat.
That's what Nature is so good at.
You go easy on bricks and big on glass
so that space may sashay your parquet like grass."

1911 is wholly given
to looking balanced albeit uneven.
In Hamburg, stirring his nation's helm
the German Kaiser (for you, Wilhelm
the Second) demands what sounds weird for some:
"A Place for Germany in the Sun."
If you were French, you would say *C'est tout.*
Yet Hitler is barely twenty-two
and things in the sun aren't so hot besides.
The activity of the sun excites
the Chinese to abolish pigtails and then
proclaim a republic with Sun Yat-Sen
their first President. (Although how three hundred
twenty-five millions can be handled
by a Parliament, frankly, beats
me. That is, how many seats
would they have had in that great pavilion?

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And even if it's just one guy per million
what would a minority of, say, ten percent
add up to? This is like counting sand!
For this democracy has no lexicon!)
Along the same latitude, the Mexican
Civil War is over, and saintly, hesitant
Francisco Madero becomes the President.
Italy finding the Turks too coarse
to deal with, resorts to the air force
for the first time in history, while da Vinci's
Mona Lisa gets stolen from the Louvre—which is
why the cops in Paris grab Monsieur Guillaume
Apollinaire who though born in Rome,
writes in French, and has other energies.
Rilke prints his Duinese Elegies
and in London, suffragettes poke their black
umbrellas at Whitehall and cry Alack!

Man of the year is a great Norwegian.
The crucial word in their tongue is "Skol."
They are born wearing turtlenecks in that region.
When they go South, they hit the Pole.

(Roald Amundsen)

"I am Roald Amundsen. I like ice.
The world is my oyster for it's capped twice
with ice: first, Arctical, then Antartical.
Human life in those parts is a missing article.
O! when the temperature falls subzero
the eyes grow blue, the heart sincere.
There are neither doubts nor a question mark:
it's the tails of your huskies which pull and bark."

1912. Captain Robert Scott
reaches the South Pole also. Except he got
there later than Amundsen. He stares at ice,
thinks of his family, prays, and dies.
Ice, however, is not through yet.
S.S. Titanic hits an iceberg at
full speed and goes down. The bell grimly tolls

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at Lloyd's in London. Fifteen hundred souls
are lost, if not more. Therefore, let's turn
to Romania where Eugene Ionesco's born
or to Turkey and her Balkan neighbors: each
one of them feels an itch to reach
for the gun; on reflection, though, they abandon
the idea. It's peace everywhere. In London
by now there are five hundred movie theatres
which makes an issue of baby-sitters.
At home, after having less done than said,
Woodrow Wilson becomes the Prez. Dead-set
to pocket the dizzy with flipping coin
New Mexico and Arizona join
the Union. For all its steel mills and farms
the Union keeps currently under arms
only one hundred thousand men. That's barmy
considering five million in the Russian Army,
or four million in Germany, or the French
who, too, have as many to fill a trench.
This sounds to some like a lack of caution.
But then there is the Atlantic Ocean
between the Continent and the U.S.,
and it's only 1912, God bless,
and the hemispheres luckily seem unable
to play the now popular Cain and Abel.

The man of the year is both short and tall.
He's nameless, and well he should
stay nameless: for spoiling for us free fall
by using a parachute.

(Captain Albert Berry)

Leaving home with umbrella? Take a parachute!
When it rains from below, that is when they shoot
down a plane and its pilot objects to die,
when you want to grab Holland or drop a spy
behind enemy lines, you need parachutes.
O, they'll be more popular than a pair of shoes.
In their soft descent they suggest a dove.
Ay! it's not only love that comes from above!

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1913. Peace is wearing thin
in the Balkans. Great powers try their pristine
routine of talks, but only soil white gloves:
Turkey and the whole bunch of Slavs
slash one another as if there is no tomorrow.
The States think there is; and being thorough
introduce the federal income tax.
Still, what really spells the *Pax*
Americana is the assembly line
Ford installs in Michigan. Some decline
of capitalism! No libertine or Marxist
could foresee this development in the darkest
possible dream. Speaking of such a dream,
California hears the first natal scream
of Richard Nixon. However, the most
loaded sounds are those uttered by Robert Frost
whose *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*
are printed in England and nearly lost on
his compatriots eyeing in sentimental
rapture the newly-built Grand Central
Station where they later would
act as though hired by Hollywood.
In the meantime, M. Proust lets his stylus saunter
the Swann's Way, H. Geiger designs his counter;
probing nothing perilous or *perdu*,
Stravinsky produces *Le Sacre du*
Printemps, a ballet, in Paris, France.
But the foxtrot is what people really dance.
And as Schweitzer cures lepers and subs dive deeper,
the hottest news is the modest zipper.
Think of the preliminaries it skips
timing your lips with your fingertips!

The man of the year is, I fear, Niels Bohr.
He comes from the same place as danishes.
He builds what one feels like when one can't score
or what one looks like when one vanishes.

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(Niels Bohr)

Atoms are small. Atoms are nice.
  Until you split one, of course.
Then they get large enough to play dice
  with your whole universe.
A model of an atom is what I've built!
  Something both small and big!
Inside, it resembles the sense of guilt.
  Outside, the lunar dig.

1914

Nineteen-fourteen! Oh, nineteen-fourteen!
Ah, some years shouldn't be let out of quarantine!
Well, this is one of them. Things get raw:
In Paris, the editor of *Figaro*
is shot dead by the wife of the French finance
minister, for printing this lady's—*sans*
merci, should we add?—steamy letters to
—ah, who cares! . . And apparently it's *c'est tout*
also for a socialist and pacifist
of all times, Jean Jaurès. He who shook his fist
at the Parliament urging hot heads to cool it,
dies, as he dines, by some bigot's bullet
in a cafe. Ah, those early, single
shots of Nineteen-fourteen! ah, the index finger
of an assassin! ah white puffs in the blue acrylic! . . .
There is something pastoral, nay! idyllic
about these murders. About that Irish enema
the Brits suffer in Dublin again. And about Panama
Canal's grand opening. Or about that doc
and his open heart surgery on his dog . . .
Well, to make these things disappear forever,
the Archduke is arriving at Sarajevo;
and there is in the crowd that unshaven, timid
youth, with his handgun. . . . *(To be continued)*

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Paul Hollander

THE SURVIVAL OF THE ADVERSARY CULTURE

There is a widespread belief that the Reagan years have been marked by the retreat or virtual disappearance of the adversarial movements and dispositions associated with the 1960s and characterized by a visceral rejection, or reflexive disparagement, of the major American institutions and "middle American" values. It is my contention that these adversarial attitudes have survived well into the 1980s, notwithstanding the Reagan presidencies, the "me-decade," the "Yuppies," the neoconservatives, and the transformation of many former activists and full-time protesters into professionals and bureaucrats of various kinds.

Since the 1960s much of what had once been considered radical social criticism has become assimilated, with some modifications, into mainstream social values. Notions of "moderate," "liberal," "radical," or "conservative" have been redefined—the "center" shifted towards the left. These developments have made the critiques of society, which have been with us for decades, less noticeable; we are so used to them we barely register them, just as we hardly notice the billboards lining the road along a familiar route to work.

The major producers of social criticism and the most steadfast adherents of the adversary culture have been our intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals (people with some higher education in certain non-manual occupations who are predisposed to take an adversarial stand, without exhibiting any of the more creative and truly nonconformist attitudes traditionally associated with intellectuals). They can be found primarily in academia, and especially in the schools and departments of the humanities and social sciences; in the media, foundations, publishing houses, and some church organizations; also in the so-called helping professions. Given the original conception of intellectuals as a small, nonconformist, often beleaguered vanguard on the battlefield of ideas, it is hard to think of them as numbering in the millions as they do today in the United States.

There is growing evidence that the contrasts between the 1960s—seen as the period of the most vocal rejection of American society in recent times—and the decades that followed have been greatly overdrawn. To be sure, the rejection of the status quo in the 1980s

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has been less frequently reflected in street demonstrations, uncompromising rhetoric, dramatic political gestures, or the colorful proliferation of "alternative lifestyles." Thus, for example, the suggestions of a leaflet circulated in 1968—endorsed at the time by Tom Hayden (who himself exemplifies the process of adopting a more circumspect political demeanor while retaining the values of the 1960s)—are clearly extreme by current standards: "Burn your money. . . . Break down the family, church, nature, city, economy. . . . What is needed is a generation of people who are freaky, crazy, irrational, sexy, angry, irreligious, childish and mad. People who burn draft cards, burn high school and college degrees, people who say 'to hell with your goals!' People who . . . redefine the normal. . . . Burn your houses down and you will be free."

Today many people who harbor strong negative feelings about the prevailing social order work nonetheless "within the system" but without any sense of allegiance towards it. Thus, for instance, it is quite unlikely that Bernardine Dohrn, a former leader of the Weather Underground, who recently joined a prestigious law firm in New York, has significantly modified her views of "the Establishment" still held when she surfaced from her underground life in 1980. At the time, as reported in *The New Republic*, "She accused the U.S. of 'unspeakable crimes' and said she still believed 'in the necessity of underground work'." Likewise Staughton Lynd has switched from being a more or less full-time antiwar activist and Viet Cong sympathizer to the role of labor lawyer "helping workers in struggles with corporations and union leaders. His philosophy and confrontational tactics have not changed," noted *The New York Times*. Nor, one may add, has his sympathy towards Marxist-Leninist regimes changed. He wrote in 1979: "I believe that Vietnamese communism, like Communism in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, has improved the life of the majority . . . while repressing minorities." He, as other social critics of the same (1960s) generation, has retained the propensity to give every benefit of doubt to countries or political movements locked in conflict with the United States, having shifted his support from the Viet Cong to Marxist Nicaragua.

A prominent characteristic of the social criticism that has flourished since the 1960s and is still with us has been an incapacity—willed or genuine—to discriminate between various types and degrees of social evil or political-moral corruption. The polemical attribution of fascism to the United States used to be typical of this approach. More recently the temporary dispatch of American troops to Grenada

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—where they were welcomed as liberators—has been equated with six years of exceptionally brutal and secretive Soviet warfare in Afghanistan, involving approximately 120,000 troops and producing millions of refugees and hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties.

The impaired ability to discriminate (connected to the alienated sensibility) is displayed in another context when New York literati, led by Norman Mailer, misidentify a violent criminal (Jack Abbot) as a great creative artist and authentic witness to the inhumanity of American society; when Gore Vidal equates the military takeover in post-Solidarity Poland with the "occupation" of the United States by corporations; or when Arthur Miller asserts that the controls (exercised by *The New York Times*) over what is produced in American theaters are tighter than the censorship in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.

The powers of discrimination were also overwhelmed by social critical passion when George Wald, Nobel Prize-winning scientist, declared in 1982 that "we Americans . . . are the most brainwashed people in the world" and when Raymond Hunthausen, archbishop of Seattle observed ". . . that Trident [the American nuclear submarine] is the Auschwitz of Puget Sound." Not to be outdone, Noam Chomsky referred to American schools as ". . . the first training ground for troops that will enforce the muted, unending terror of the status quo in the coming years of a projected American century . . ." while James Baldwin, the black writer, opined that "the educational system of this country is . . . designed to destroy the black child. It does not matter whether it destroys him by stoning him in the ghetto or by driving him mad in the isolation of Harvard."

Reflecting on the enfeeblement of the powers of discrimination, it may also be recalled that in the 1960s and early seventies not a few academic intellectuals entertained the notion that college students were a new class of "niggers," while Louis Kampf (former head of the Modern Language Association) deemed the Lincoln Center such a source of elitist corruption that he urged—in his "Notes Toward a Radical Culture"—its defacement with substances rarely mentioned in polite conversation.

Critiques of the evils of technology have also endured and flourished since the Vietnam War up to the present. The propensity to misuse technology was said to be a characteristic of American culture, predisposing to the gratuitous and massive use of violence, as argued, among others, by Susan Sontag and more recently by Loren Baritz. Other critics such as Richard Barnett and Marcus Raskin

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(founders of the Institute of Policy Studies) preferred to look upon the Vietnam War as a manifestation of "the disease of an entire ruling class" and suggested that it was deliberate American policy "to create widespread civilian casualties."

For Noam Chomsky the United States stood for a "commitment to a social order that guarantees endless suffering and humiliation and denial of elementary human rights," and he faulted American foreign policy for the killings by the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia (while viewing these atrocities as greatly exaggerated by the American media). Moreover he believed, in the words of a reviewer, that ". . . the U.S. Government favors client states with bloody-minded dictators over Third World democracy. . . ."

Critiques of the domestic defects of the United States also continued through the 1980s. Expanded conceptions of the underprivileged retained credibility not only in academic but also political circles; a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Ronald V. Dellum, asserted that "America is a nation of niggers. . . . If you are black, you're a nigger. If you're an amputee, you're a nigger. Blind people, women, students, the handicapped, radical environmentalists, poor whites, those too far to the left are all niggers."

In less colorful language college texts in sociology have identified the United States as the singular repository of social problems, including racism, which, according to one, ". . . has positive consequences for the maintenance of the status quo." Crime too has been seen in a similar light, "sustain[ed] . . . as a highly visible component of the American experience . . ." since "for many Americans criminals serve as a negative reference group whose violations of common decency render such decency uncommon and praiseworthy." Accordingly, inequality or "the continuing victimization of the disinherited" also has been deliberately maintained for the social-psychological gratification of those better off.

The horrors of technology appeared in new incarnations in the 1980s. Marge Piercy, the feminist writer, said: "Technology is monstrous . . . because our values are monstrous. . . . They are killing us . . . with cancer, drugs, contraceptives, food, asbestos . . . bad schools and television." She too perceived American society teeming with "'oppressed' peoples—women, laborers, blacks, the poor, native Americans, older people—whose lives are controlled by the 'ruling class'."

The popular writer E. L. Doctorow entertained an equally gloomy vision of American society in the 1980s: "Our psychic dete-

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rioration goes beyond intellectual life. In the past ten years there has been a terrible loss of moral energy in arts, in politics, in social expectations. . . ."

The year of 1984 provided new opportunities for launching critiques of American society. A host of commentators averred that the insights and predictions Orwell incorporated into *1984* are applicable foremost to American society today. Walter Cronkite wrote:

> Would Smith [of the novel] recognize the origins of his world in a democracy such as ours where . . . educational performance is on the decline; where the result is a growing number of functional illiterates. . . ? Could Smith see the seeds of his Oceania in our society, in which the Federal Government tries to shroud more and more of its activities with 'security' classifications; in which scientists keep the Government informed of their research. . . ?
>
> . . . in our world, where a Vietnam village can be destroyed so it can be saved; where the President names the latest thing in nuclear missiles the 'Peacekeeper'—in such a world can the Orwellian vision be far away?

A. M. Eckstein observed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that at an academic conference on *1984* (financed in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities) ". . . the basic theme of most of the papers . . . was that the totalitarian nightmare of *1984* has been, or at least is about to be, most fully realized in America. . . . Paper after paper attacked the United States for the highly oppressive character of its culture, society and government . . . there was not a single presentation on Eastern Europe, 'Socialist' Asia or the Soviet Union." Similar themes were sounded at another scholarly gathering organized by the Modern Language Association in New York City. According to Professor Gene Bell-Villada of Williams College, ". . . Orwell's vision . . . could already be seen in such phenomena as Watergate, urban slums, multinational conglomerates and sophisticated techniques of surveillance." In the opinion of Professor Cripsin Miller of Johns Hopkins University ". . . the United States bore deep similarities to the totalitarian 'Oceanic State' of Orwell's imagination."

The increasingly popular idea of a moral equivalence between the "superpowers" has been yet another vehicle for expressing criticism of the United States. While on the surface this doctrine equates the two political systems in a seemingly neutral way stressing areas of symmetry or similarity, more often than not it combines aversion

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toward the United States with an attitude of giving the benefit of doubt to the Soviet Union. While the critiques of the former tend to be passionate and specific, the reproaches of the latter are vague and perfunctory, lacking in moral fervor and indignation. The recent PEN Congress in New York City provided an unusually rich harvest of such attitudes ranging from Norman Mailer's designation of both the United States and the Soviet Union as "neurotic giants," to Gunther Grass's insistence that life in the United States was in no way preferable to life in the Soviet Union, to the hostility towards Secretary of State Shultz paralleled by fawning admiration toward Omar Cabezas, Deputy Minister of Interior of Nicaragua (and as such directly responsible for censorship). There was also great enthusiasm about petitions protesting American policy in Nicaragua but no petitions protesting Soviet policy anywhere. According to Walter Goodman of *The New York Times*, the posture of alienation remained for many participants "an irresistible conceit."

Upholders of the moral equivalence thesis range from prominent scholar-diplomats like George Kennan, to full-time social critics (such as the associates of the Institute of Policy Studies), journalists taking pride in their objectivity, and uncounted millions of educated Americans who are not friendly towards the Soviet Union but are uncomfortable with the idea that their own society may have a moral edge over it. These tendencies have been strengthened by the peace movement concerned with what it sees as the adverse effects of American arrogance on resolving disagreements between these two nations.

Kennan's observations typify the attitudes associated with moral equivalence and the policy recommendations drawn from it:

> Isn't it grotesque to spend so much of our energy on opposing Russia to save a West which is honeycombed with bewilderment and a profound sense of internal decay? Show me first an America which has successfully coped with . . . crime, drugs, deteriorating educational standards, urban decay, pornography and decadence of one sort or another . . . then I will tell you how we are going to defend ourselves from the Russians. But, as things are, I can see very little merit in organizing ourselves to defend from the Russians the porno shops in central Washington. In fact the Russians are much better in holding pornography at bay than we are.

The popular conception of moral equivalence much heard on

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college campuses was captured in a letter to the local newspaper written by a Smith College student:

> On the moral issues of war and peace it is important to realize that the United States is not perfect and the Soviet Union is not evil. American citizens . . . therefore have no right to take a moral stance against the USSR. . . .
>
> Until our country is perfect, we should refrain from proclaiming ourselves judges of "human rights" in other countries. It is blatant hypocrisy.

E. L. Doctorow's version of moral equivalence also has been frequently heard since the 1960s:

> Each of the superpowers has the demonic *other* to justify its espionage, its assassinations, its interventions and its invasions. We and the Soviet Union have actually created an unholy alliance, a gargantuan intimacy, in which, by now, our ideological differences are less important than the fact that we think the same thoughts, mirror each other's responses. . . .

The belief in moral equivalence is not limited to a handful of academics or literary intellectuals. In a survey of 3,500 readers of the magazine *Psychology Today* conducted in 1984, the researchers were led to "the conclusion that a 'mirror image' exists between Soviet and American military conduct and posture." They also found that "for every man or woman who said that the Soviet Union had been more aggressive, four others pointed the finger at the United States."

While libraries could be filled with the impressionistic and qualitative reflections and recent examples of social criticism among American intellectuals, these statements and a widespread receptivity to them are supported by the findings of opinion research among American elite groups.

Reviewing studies of faculty elites since World War II, Seymour Martin Lipset reached the conclusion in 1982 that they "have been disproportionately critical of society, and more disposed than other strata to support forces that reject the status quo." He also found—and thereby disposed of the notion that failure or frustration explain the social critical disposition—that "the higher the achievement, the more liberal faculty members are politically" and that "the more successful are the most left-inclined."

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In their studies of media elites S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman found similar evidence of a strong social-critical disposition. Fifty-four percent in their sample "place[d] themselves to the left of center, compared to only nineteen percent who chose the right side of the spectrum." Forty-six percent believed that the "U.S. exploits Third World, causes poverty"; fifty-seven percent believed "U.S. use of resources immoral"; fifty-one percent that the "goal of foreign policy is to protect U.S. business . . ."; eighty-six percent that "big corporations should be publicly owned." Eighty-one percent of them voted for McGovern in 1972.

In another study the same authors probed the attitudes of leaders or top staffers in seventy-four public interest organizations as well as major public interest law firms. They concluded, among other things:

> The liberalism of public interest leaders shades into profound dissatisfaction with the American social and economic order. . . . In fact their alienation was one of our most striking findings. . . .
>
> . . . Only about half the public interest leaders believe the system can be salvaged.

As was the case with the media elite, the public interest elite also favored McGovern, with ninety-six percent of those sampled voting for him. They too come from comfortable backgrounds and possess impressive educational credentials and belong to what may be called the sixties generation.

In yet another study the same authors examined the political values and attitudes of highly successful moviemakers: "primarily white males with very large incomes . . . and a low regard for our institutions." Eighty-two percent of them voted for McGovern. While not anticapitalist (perhaps not surprisingly, with two-thirds of them reporting family incomes in excess of $200,000 per year), "they are alienated from society in other ways. . . . over half think that American institutions need a complete overhaul."

In a corresponding study these authors addressed the same questions to "the cream of television's creative community." They found "forty-three percent endors[ing] a complete overhaul of American institutions . . . their acceptance of the economic system is tempered by a deep-set alienation from the social-political system." Moreover ". . . the television elite is deeply dissatisfied with the direction our society is taking and would like to alter it in profound ways."

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Reviewing the findings of all the elite studies carried out so far, Rothman concluded in 1985 that "while some commentators believe that the 1980s have been characterized by a revival of more traditional values, my research thus far indicates that appearances are deceptive. The rate of change may have slowed, but the patterns which emerged in the 1960s have been incorporated into American culture, to a considerable extent."

Another development that has signaled the gains made by the social-critical spirit in American life has been the growing entrenchment over the past two decades of Marxist academics. As stated by two of them—Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff—"A Marxist cultural revolution is taking place today in American universities." They noted among the gains made by this movement the new spurt in the publishing of Marxist texts and textbooks by prestigious academic publishers and over four hundred courses offered in Marxist philosophy, as well as the election of Marxists to head the organizations of American historians and teachers of literature.

There have been other indications of the persistence and revival of the radical-critical attitudes on American campuses and of the domination of the public political discourse by left-wing causes and groups. Speakers disliked by radical groups still cannot, as a rule, exercise their right to free speech, be they officials of the United States Government (such as Jeane Kirkpatrick or Caspar Weinberger), or representatives of anti-Sandinista groups in Nicaragua (like Eden Pastora), or scientists who believe in the importance of heredity (like William Shockley and Arthur Jensen) or former radicals converted to evangelical Christianity (like Eldridge Cleaver).

The presence of social criticism and the influence of the sensibilities of the 1960s is not limited to higher education. In an exhaustive study of the presentation of religious and traditional values in public school textbooks read by an estimated sixty percent of all American students taking United States history, Professor Paul Vitz found "a strong liberal bias" and role models who were predominantly associated with liberal political or social causes. The political bias of these texts was also reflected in their tendency to characterize recent American history in terms of three issues: minorities, feminism, and ecology, and in an antibusiness attitude.

The critiques of the 1980s are hard to distinguish from those of the 1960s. Both focus on the evils of capitalism: impersonality, injustice, inequality, and greed. Capitalism is also blamed for the undermining of community and the impoverishment of personal relation-

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ships. Sexism and racism are considered by the critics essential parts of American culture—often but not invariably associated with capitalism. Capitalist technology is regarded as particularly dangerous, leading to the despoliation of nature and fueling the arms race. The United States has become for the social critics the major threat to world peace, a country which also seeks to maintain or expand its economic stranglehold over Third World nations, syphoning off their wealth and degrading their national independence. American policies in Central America have been especially strongly criticized and viewed as replications of the Vietnam policies.

It has become customary in the 1980s for those critical of American society and foreign policy to demonstrate their opposition by embarking on political tours of Nicaragua and, upon their return, to proselytize on behalf of that government. Such political tourism, and the associated idealization of the Marxist-Leninist regime (closely following past patterns first established by the pilgrimages to Stalin's Soviet Union and later to Mao's China), have been among the most persuasive indicators of the persistence of the adversarial disposition displayed by an estimated 100,000 tourists and a far larger supportive audience.

The social critical temper and a strong sense of the flaws of society have for some time been a part of the self-identification of elite intellectuals—and increasingly also of those I called quasi-intellectuals—in the West. As Czeslaw Milosz pointed out, "A conviction of decadence, the rotting of the West, seems to be a permanent part of the equipment of enlightened and sensitive people for dealing with the horrors accompanying technological progress." This is not to say that the critical impulses displayed are consistently applied. In fact the critics discussed here alternate between moral absolutism and moral relativism. The former is reserved for their own society which is judged by high and uncompromising standards while moral relativism and far more flexible standards apply to other societies, especially those adversarial towards their own. This attitude is often associated with "selective determinism." Groups (or countries) designated as underdogs are objects of sympathy; they are not to be judged since their behavior (or policy) is determined by forces beyond their control; by contrast the groups (or countries) viewed with hostility are not seen as similarly shaped by their environment or history; they can make choices and hence deserve to be judged. Another way to put it is that American social critics, even the most severe among them, harbor high expectations about their society, and it is the frus-

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tration of these expectations which often turns into bitterness and rejection. In the final analysis alienation is, among other things, a response to the frustration due to the lack of meaning in modern society. It has been pointed out often enough that political beliefs take on religious coloration when religion proper withers. More recently Doris Lessing observed:

> There are certain types of people who are political out of a kind of religious reason. . . . I think it's fairly common among socialists: They are in fact God-seekers, looking for the kingdom of God on earth . . . trying to abolish the present in favor of some better future—always taking it for granted that there *is* a better future. If you don't believe in heaven you believe in socialism.

There is a close connection between the embrace of Marxist socialism and the social critical impulse. Marxism is a philosophy of intense moral indignation—a worldview that helps to systematize moral passion and that provides a seemingly scientific foundation for protesting social injustice. Marxism performs additional religious functions by pointing towards a better future which will arrive as a combined result of both the inexorable forces of history and the freely chosen effort of individuals who will have achieved the proper understanding of social forces.

In addition to the more general conditions of contemporary Western intellectuals, there are certain cultural-historical traits peculiar to American society which contribute to the trends here noted, chiefly an excessive individualism. This individualism combines an overly optimistic view of individual potentials with a similarly sanguine belief in the possibilities for their fulfillment. Such a conception of the individual as possessing virtually unlimited innate potential for self-realization remains a major source of social criticism in the United States, especially since the 1960s.

Thus the radical critiques of American society are nurtured not only by the discontents of modernity but also by elements of the American cultural tradition: high expectations about human and institutional perfectibility and a reactive anger when the hoped for improvements fail to materialize.

The persistence of the radical critiques of American society in the late 1970s and early 1980s also has some more tangible social-historical explanations. Among them are the memories of Vietnam and Watergate, the most often cited symbols of corruption in recent history.

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The American involvement in the Vietnam War had another, less obvious but more enduring result. If the American conduct in that war signified evil, the defeat of the United States demonstrated that this evil power was no longer invincible—a development which has contributed to a greater readiness to engage in nationwide self-criticism and an increased receptivity to accept critiques from abroad. The defeat has also weakened trust in American institutions and contributed to a decline of collective self-esteem especially among elite groups. Failure always has a delegitimating effect whereas success, even in the pursuit of the most debased goals, tends to silence doubt and criticism.

Watergate in turn revealed and highlighted corruption in domestic politics and deprived the presidency of the aura of respect and legitimacy it used to enjoy. Watergate and Vietnam together have remained powerful points of reference for an enduring national self-denigration not easily dispelled even by a cheerful and optimistic president like Reagan.

In fact, Reagan's rise to power may be considered another of the factors promoting the renewal of social criticism in the United States in recent years. With Reagan in the White House social critics could point with renewed confidence to the menacing ascendance of forces obstructing beneficial social change, to a resurgence of all trends in American life they deplored. While none of the ambivalently wishful predictions of an emerging police state or American-style fascism popular among radicals of the 1960s materialized, there was at least a conservative Republican president in the White House. He stood for everything the critics abhorred: vocal support for capitalism, unashamed American patriotism, a willingness to reassert American influence abroad, an untroubled identification with "Middle American" cultural values and an unapologetic anticommunist persuasion. His election stimulated and reinvigorated the political energies of the adversary culture.

The recruitment of many former radical activists into academic teaching positions has been yet another development conducive to the persistence of the radical critiques of American society and the consolidation of the subcultures of social criticism. Estrangement thus institutionalized has become easier to bear than Marx had dreamed of in his philosophy.

To be alienated today in America means many things not associated with the state of mind or social situation the concept used to signify. It is compatible with holding opinions both popular and

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fashionable, receiving social honors and recognition, belonging to a cohesive and sustaining subculture, having secure employment and being active in public affairs. Being estranged today may also mean access to new sources of self-esteem attendant upon the role of the righteous social critic and the self-assurance that comes from the knowledge of exposing social evil. Increasingly the sense of identity of many humanistic intellectuals has become tied in with their self-conception as both social critic and voice of secular morality in a corrupt and irrational society.

The sense of estrangement from society—that is to say, the strongly felt conviction that this society is altogether worthless and unjust—is also compatible with a reasonably cheerful personal disposition and the untroubled enjoyment of the available pleasures of life: material, social, aesthetic. It is easier today to be a social critic in the United States because the gloom, withdrawal, marginality and disadvantage earlier associated with alienation and sustained social criticism have largely receded.

Thus estrangement has survived as it acquired a certain respectability. Even the most vehement denunciations of the social order ceased to be viewed as acts of defiance, nor was any risk attached to them. On the contrary such critiques have become a badge of belonging to certain subcultures. Alienation and rejection of society could no longer be associated with nonconformity, dissent or innovative social criticism; estrangement itself has become a new subcultural norm, a new form of conformity. When hundreds of thousands of people act out jointly their "nonconformity" it does become a new form of conformity, as happened to many forms of social criticism, deviant values, "alternative life styles" and attitudes associated with the counterculture.

These changes in the substance, quality and context of estrangement and social criticism had numerous consequences. While critiques of American society have become increasingly standardized, repetitive and unoriginal, the groups and institutions devoted to their articulation and dissemination have multiplied. They include radical "think tanks" (such as the Institute of Policy Studies and its auxiliaries), large segments of academia, of the media and the churches. Gradually much of radical social criticism has become transformed into an established part of our intellectual discourse and a form of conventional wisdom.

While intellectual life in the United States has become more polarized, as the verities of the adversary culture no longer go totally

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unchallenged, many of them persist due to their institutionalization: more people than ever before make their living in occupations and institutions which permit or encourage the continued elaboration and expression of the themes of social criticism we have become familiar with since the 1960s.

Much of the foregoing discussion suggests that contrary to the conventional sociological wisdom the connection between socio-economic and political marginality on the one hand, and the propensity to radical social criticism on the other, has become tenuous, at any rate in American society. Marginality, defined in some objective way (with reference to income, education, social position and political affiliation), no longer provides a satisfactory explanation of the rejection of the prevailing social-political order. The reflexive disparagement of American society has become firmly entrenched during a period when intellectuals—including many of the most eloquent and impassioned spokesmen of social criticism—enjoyed considerable occupational success and prosperity.

Critiques of American society have over the past two decades acquired solid subcultural foundations and have become institutionalized—a process that assures their vigorous survival regardless of the (good) socio-economic fortunes and political freedom of the critics and regardless of the improvement or decline in the qualities of life in American society.

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Lionel Abel

SO WHO IS TO HAVE THE LAST WORD? (On Some of the Positions Taken by George Steiner)

I doubt if there is a single contemporary European writer who would today want to be considered a "good European," taking that term in the affirmative sense which Nietzsche originally gave it. He used the term to designate—and of course, praise—those European critics and moralists who were able to look beyond national boundaries and connect what was being achieved in their own with the great things in other countries. Since what they sought—and often enough, found—could be described as a "harmony," they were entitled—if just for seeking it—to be called "good." It is to be noted that most of those we continue to call "good Europeans" were able to find something positive in American literature. What I want to single out here especially is Nietzsche's own discovery of the force in Emerson's essays.

If European writers today become restive when their "Europeanness" is stressed, this does not mean they no longer want to be thought of as "good." But the term "European," if used in commendation, may tend to call up the nineteenth century's ethnocentrism, and with this hardly anyone around now wants to be identified. Who would want to be thought of as probably reactionary and most certainly out of date? What is more, the national cultures of Europe, once sure of their value, nowadays are stricken with self-doubt. It is hard to imagine a modern European poet, however proud of the West, expressing this with anything like the ringing unequivocation of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall":

> Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay![1]

All this is by way of bringing into view the European critic and author George Steiner who, from his post at a university in Geneva, helps rule over the book section of *The New Yorker* and writes some of

1. Ezra Pound, a poet of this, the twentieth century, proudly entitled his translations of poems from the Chinese, *Cathay*.

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its most important and rhetorically interesting reviews. Steiner has written with verve and penetration on the achievements of Dante, Homer, Sophocles, Corneille, and Hoelderlin. He knows the languages of these very different European poets, and his critic's rhetoric is often influenced by their choice of words. Can he not then be called a "good European"? Even if I knew he desired the designation, which I strongly doubt, I think I would not grant it to him. My reason: he never tries to find a harmony connecting the works of the writers he has studied. Quite to the contrary, he seems interested in removing them from under any shareable rubric; I think he would even like to segregate each particular European masterwork within its own obscurity of language and culture. In *After Babel*, a study of linguistics and linguistic theories, he tried to justify the *secretiveness* of languages, which makes any "radical translation" from them difficult, by claiming that the "incomprehensions" built into each different tongue are expressions of the genius of language as such. Correspondingly, in his literary studies, he has been interested in pointing up in the Greek poets what European poets, Renaissance and modern, have not been able to match, and in Hoelderlin's translations of Sophocles what could not conceivably be Sophoclean. His focus has been on cultural conflict and divergence, not on cultural harmony. He likes nothing so much as to set up Shakespeare and the moderns against the Athenians, and European writers against the Americans.

The "good European" Nietzsche gave us *The Birth of Tragedy*: Steiner, entitling his work on the genre, *The Death of Tragedy*, has earned for it the odd distinction of an unfavorable comparison with Nietzsche's great essay—unfavorable even on the one register where Nietzsche, too, can be faulted (mildly, to be sure). Nietzsche did, after all, separate the organic, dithyrambic side of tragedy, vulnerable to decay and death, yet capable of rebirth, from its formal side, secure against the effects of time and change. He told us that Dionysus can die, but can be reborn, while Apollo, for his part, is deathless. So if it was not quite correct of Nietzsche to use the word "birth" in describing the appearance of tragedy in Athens, where the dithyrambic drive of the genre was *first* graced with an appropriate form, yet this can hardly be called an error; on the other hand, it is definitely an error of Steiner to posit the *death* of tragedy in our own time, for the latest tragedy to have been written will most certainly not be the *last*. Only that side of tragedy which it owes to Dionysus is subject to time, and whatever the time, the Apollonian form will be

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with us. Steiner was much more severe and pessimistic about the possibilities of tragedy today than a clear view of the art requires. This, I think, is because he was bent as usual on exaggerating and amplifying differences—in this case between our own culture and that of fifth-century Greece.

Recently returning to the subject, Steiner gave us in *Antigones* his more mature reflection on what happened to the art form invented by the Greeks. Singling out the tragedy of Sophocles which Hegel judged to be his greatest, Steiner has studied almost every interpretation of the play by classicists and philosophers, and the many new versions of the play by European playwrights over the centuries, including the most recent versions of Brecht and Anouilh. The "good European" Goethe pointed unerringly to the one thing which mars the *Antigone*, and which he called "*ganz schlecht*" (altogether bad). I am referring to Antigone's incomprehensible assertion that she would not have done for any other member of her family what she was prepared to do for her brother, our felt objection to this being that in her action, for which she gives her life, she represents her family against the state. Hegel, another "good European," pointed out—one of his remarkable insights—that the sister is the most perfect ethical representative of the family, more perfect in such a role even than the mother, who has enjoyed sexual pleasure in conceiving her children. And Antigone's speech in Sophocles's play incomprehensively negates all that gives her the authority to act as she does. That Steiner has not been able to equal these insights of Goethe and of Hegel is not at all surprising—neither have our best classicists. The interesting thing though is that he cannot even deal with the greatest judgements of the *Antigone* in a whole volume devoted to the play, and to the various ways in which it has been understood. For he is interested in setting Sophocles's play on a level which Western dramatic thought and dramatic composition since the Greeks simply cannot match, and this attitude towards the *Antigone* is not forced on him by the play's excellence; it is, I believe, *willed*, and follows from his determination (which I have tried to understand) to differ with the judgement of "good Europeans." But there is this consequence: he does not see the continuity of our own experience with that of Athenians of the fifth century, and he does not see that the theme of the *Antigone* is the theme of civilization as such. Not that one could reasonably expect a modern woman to sacrifice her life in order to give a dead brother proper burial. This is why the plot of the *Antigone* is just impossible in a modern setting,

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unless one makes the heroine irrational, as Anouilh did. But on the other hand, we are still concerned, and we have to be, to call ourselves civilized, with some ceremonial politeness toward the dead. And this may often require *some* kind of sacrifice. As Heidegger has put it, even a dead person is not a thing, but a "having-been-a-presence-in-the-world." Perhaps one of the most original and creative treatments of the theme of the *Antigone* can be found in Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*, in which Addie Bundren, propped in her bed, watches through her window the fashioning of her coffin, and determines the place where her children are to bury her. Once she is dead, they cart her for some forty miles to Jefferson so that she can be buried with those she knew as a child. Now, some of her children, like Jewel, treat the dead Addie as a person; others, like Darl, treat her as a thing. And in some children the two attitudes alternate. Now Steiner, who has looked into the most trivial versions of the *Antigone*, has not even noticed one of the most original works by a modern in treatment of its theme.

I suggested that there are hardly any European writers who today want to be considered "good Europeans." But many of us have read and enjoyed the essays of a "good" Belgian-French-American critic, the late Paul de Man, who ended his career in the American university system as a Yale professor. A comparison of some of his writings on literary topics with Steiner's are surely in order here. Now I am not always in agreement with de Man's critical procedures, which I have criticized elsewhere. I am inclined to reject out of hand his notions about reading, rhetoric, and deconstruction; but when I compare one of de Man's late essays on lyric poetry with Steiner's *Antigones*, the comparison has to favor de Man's methods against Steiner's. What de Man does in his essay on the lyric is to lift Keats's much criticized "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," by associating it with this much more sophisticated judgment of Nietzsche's: "What is truth? A manoeuverable army of metaphors, metonomies, and anthropomorphisms," and also with the whole content of Baudelaire's sonnet, *Correspondances*. The effect is to give meaning to, rather than remove meaning from, Keats's line. I think Steiner has something to learn from such a procedure. When he compares European drama with the Greek tragedies, he diminishes almost everything after Sophocles, even the works of Shakespeare. He writes:

> There ought to be by now a pride of "Hamlets," "Macbeths," "Othellos," and "Lears" related to the canon as are the numerous

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> versions of "Greek" tragedy since Rome. . . . It is on the contrary, Oedipus and Electra, Antigone and the Eumenides, who have been given incessant voice in twentieth-century high theater and poetry.

And Steiner asks why this should be.

In fact, nothing of any great importance has been said by the "incessant voice" retelling in this century any of the Greek myths. The last great play which took up one of these myths was Goethe's version of *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Steiner asks, "What significant "Hamlets" after *Hamlet*?" and answers his question thus:

> There are fitful brilliances of recall in Musset's *Lorenzaccio*. Laforgue's Hamlet is an intriguing fragment, tangential to its source. Hamlet, as a persona, as a complex of attitudes, is vividly present in Russian poetry from Pushkin to Pasternak. But there is little here to match the legacy of *imitatio* and variant, of recapitulation and pastiche, which follows on Agamemnon, on Helen of Sparta, on Laius and his breed.

Steiner adds that the only recapitulation of Shakespeare's *Lear* was Edward Bond's unsatisfactory—my judgement of it—melodrama. But these assertions, once questioned, do not hold. The theme of *Lear* was taken up again, and for George Moore to more perfect effect, in Balzac's *Père Goriot*. As for Hamlet, there are certainly far greater projections of his character than the protagonist of Musset's tragedy. What about Ivan Karamazov, in Dostoyevsky's novel, and Prince André, in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*? And what about the tremendous recapitulation of Hamlet in real life by Søren Kierkegaard, from whom Steiner took the very term "recapitulation"? I could give many other examples of creative imitations and variations of Shakespeare's characters, but I think the examples I have advanced are sufficient to show the *willed* nature of Steiner's judgement of the poet. What I cannot let pass is a further criticism that Steiner makes leaning on Wittgenstein, who apparently said that while Shakespeare did indeed invent new forms of language, he was "*not* true to nature." I think it sufficient to note here that for Wittgenstein, truth to nature was a linguistic fact, not a fact of nature. We know that the color "red" is rightly understood, he asserted, if the sentence in which the term is used is grammatically correct. With all due respect, I do not think that Wittgenstein should be permitted to

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deny his own doctrine in what was surely a casual criticism of Shakespeare. And I do not want to let Steiner obtain any credence for his own criticism with a quotation from the philosopher.

It has been my assumption that the attitude of someone sitting in judgement on Greek and European drama should not drastically differ from the attitude of those we have known as "good Europeans." The point, of course, is unprovable. It has been my way of explaining, or finding a background for, what I regard as Steiner's critical errors. Now I want to take up a work by him for which his lack of "good"—I should even say "nice"—Europeanness, might well have proved to be an advantage. He has written a Holocaust fiction—I don't think it right to call the work, as some have, a novel—and in the treatment, even fictional, of events of or related to the Holocaust, strict moral judgement, rather than cultural breadth, which often brings with it a certain moral laxity, would seem to be in order.

What do we find in Steiner's narrative *The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H.*, a direct treatment of the Holocaust and its main architect, Hitler? The story—I should say the myth—for Steiner does not expect readers to believe the events related actually occurred, goes something like this: Hitler is presumed to have escaped from his Berlin bunker (where, in fact, he committed suicide), and to have found his way to some jungle-nowhere in Brazil. His hideout is discovered; he is tracked down by a group of Israelis and forced to stand trial. Hitler's speech in defense of all his actions ends the narrative.

The Portage has not escaped attack, and some of its critics have even charged its author with anti-Semitism. This criticism is wide of the mark, but to deny that Steiner is anti-Semitic is not to answer the questions his fiction has raised. What, one may properly ask, is the author's overall attitude towards the events he describes? I must say it was a matter of surprise to discover it to be not unlike that of the "good European" critics he wanted to distance himself from when comparing Greek tragedy with Renaissance and modern drama. In those efforts he tried to *disconnect* the Greek playwrights spiritually and philosophically from the European playwrights who have taken them as models. But Steiner's tactic in his Holocaust fiction is just the reverse: here he tries to *connect* the Jews and the Nazis, victims and executioners in closely resembling moral deficiencies, thus mitigating the horror of the greater by association with the less hor-

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rid. After all, if nobody is innocent, then who is to cast the first stone against Hitler?

This is the burden of Hitler's speech in defense of all his actions. Arguing with the Israelis who have cornered him, he points to the guilt of the Allied powers for the Holocaust; had he not offered to send them the Jews of Europe? Did they not ignore his offer? He mentions the Gulag of Stalin, which was in existence before his own death camps. Then, too, he insists that he learned his notions of racial superiority from the Jews themselves. And he contends that as his victims have a share of the guilt for his own crimes against them, he, Hitler, has to be approved for what was achieved as a result of these crimes and could never have come about otherwise: the establishment of the state of Israel.

It is important to note that this speech by Hitler is the most eloquent and intellectually interesting statement in Steiner's whole narrative. And it goes unanswered.

Here I cannot but contrast Steiner's Holocaust narrative with *The Last Days of Mankind*, the Austrian satirist Karl Kraus's play about the First World War. Now Kraus was much too savage a moralist ever to be taken for a "good European." In *The Last Days of Mankind*, he never tries to evade a clear and clearly one-sided moral judgement of the major political entities represented on his stage: France, England, the Austro-Hungarian and German empires. He takes sides. He is for the Allies, and against the Central powers. He is for France and England, and against the armies of the German Kaiser and his own Emperor, Franz-Joseph. He is for the *Lusitania* and against the German U-boat campaign. He is for the cathedral of Rheims, and against the German Big Berthas that bombarded it. When one of the characters in the play argues against Kraus's *raisonneur* and spokesman, *The Grumbler*, that cathedrals can be important military positions, the brilliant reply comes: "Men are most certainly important military positions. I wish the cathedrals could fire on them."

What is more, Hitler in *The Portage* makes all the interesting and provocative moral judgements, which is why some critics have taken him to be Steiner's spokesman.

The charge, as I indicated, cannot be maintained, but other charges have been made by critics which are certainly justified, and it is not at all the case that Robert Boyers, in his essay on Steiner in *Atrocity and Amnesia*, has made mincemeat of these critics, as a book reviewer for *The New Republic* has recently claimed. One critic of *The*

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Portage, Alvin Rosenfeld, has made two points against the book which Boyers has certainly not answered satisfactorily. These arguments are: (1) that Steiner has lent Hitler theological-political notions about the Jews of a kind that Hitler was incapable of formulating, which there is no evidence that he ever held, and which Steiner, in fact, expressed as his own before writing *The Portage*, and (2) in the expression of these views Hitler has been granted, dramatically speaking, "the last word."

Boyers in his book presents a single argument to answer Rosenfeld's objections. His claim is that Steiner showed Hitler as a transvaluer of values; is not this in fact what Hitler was? Boyers puts the matter thus:

> *The Portage* had to end with Hitler's speech because it is the object of the novel to show what the power of transvaluation is all about. The last speech demonstrates that a Hitler can appropriate a Steiner for his purposes.

Now this will hardly do. For the very opposite claim has been made by Rosenfeld, namely that Steiner has appropriated Hitler to his, Steiner's, purpose, that being in Boyer's very revealing words, to show ". . . what the power of transvaluation is all about." What is more, the Hitler of Steiner's narrative is not at all the Hitler of history, but a Hitler altered to fit Steiner's plot. The Hitler of history refused to live outside of it, preferring to die in his Berlin bunker, rather than seek safety in obscurity like Eichmann and Mengele.

If Steiner has been unfair to Hitler in his narrative, he is at least equally unfair to Hitler's victims, the Jews, in ending *The Portage* with Hitler's speech. This raises a further question: does Steiner perhaps think that Hitler had "the last word" in his argument with the Jews, not just metaphorically, but in the fullness of historical fact?

In the speech Steiner has written for him, Hitler describes his political ideology as an *effect* of Jewish ideas, and his political actions (which determined the scope of the Holocaust) as the *cause* of the state of Israel. Now if these notions can be taken as true, if Nazism can in any serious sense be judged to be a product of Jewish ideas, if Hitler in any important respect can be said to have brought forth the state of Israel, then I should say that Hitler has indeed had "the last word" in his argument with the Jews and, in addition to having put

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six million of them to death, has triumphed even over those who survived him. Here I want to make a personal statement: I always thought after the establishment of Israel that we Jews had indeed had "the last word" in the argument with Hitler, and so much so that at some point in the future the Fuehrer might even become a Jewish holiday, on which we would eat a particular pastry named for him, as on Purim we eat prune tarts named for Haman.

But the state of Israel was not provided by the Holocaust. It was provided by Jews responding to the Holocaust, and if they had not provided themselves and their descendants with the state of Israel, they would indeed have been totally defeated by the Fuehrer. He would indeed have had "the last word." And I must make a further point. If the establishment of Israel is in any sense unreal, or just temporary, if it can be truly said to be spurious, then too I think that Hitler has had "the last word" against us. Now Steiner, since publishing *The Portage*, has expressed the view that the reestablishment of Israel in Palestine was "spurious." This is the very word he has chosen to describe the reality of Israel, which is for Steiner a "spurious" reality. No matter the why of this judgement. I do not feel I have to argue against it here. I have left that for a postscript. All I want to establish now is that this is the judgement of Israel Steiner has made. It appears in an article of his, "Our Homeland, the Text," in the 1985 Winter-Spring issue of *Salmagundi.* But if Israel is indeed spurious, if it is indeed as Steiner has intimated a "fake Zion," then how can one object to his having given Hitler the final speech in a Holocaust fiction? If I thought of Israel as Steiner evidently does, then I would praise rather than fault his narrative strategy, and I would say openly what Steiner is saying more circumspectly, perhaps not without pain, that in his quarrel with the Jews, Hitler in actual and final fact has had, everything considered, "the last word."

I believe that when a responsible writer takes up a subject he must consider what attitude he has to take up to treat that subject fairly. I think that George Steiner should have understood that the "good European" stress on continuity and harmony, which proved useful in relating Greek to Renaissance and even modern drama, becomes perverse when focused on events of the Holocaust, an area of history marked by the most violent disruptions. I find some support for this view in Jorge Semprun's excellent memoir-fiction about the Holocaust, *What A Beautiful Sunday!* Here Semprun subjects those eminently "good Europeans" Goethe and his famous inter-

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locutor, Eckermann, to the most lively satire,[2] being convinced (imaginatively, of course) that if Goethe and Eckermann had been alive during the last war they probably would have visited Buchenwald (where Semprun was a prisoner). Semprun also supposes that Goethe would have tried to *connect* the culture of Buchenwald with the culture of pre-Nazi Germany, to which he had made so great a contribution.

But how are we to understand George Steiner? I suppose that when he addressed himself to comparing Greek and modern drama he hoped by discovering differences to prove more sophisticated than (in his view) "good Europeans" have been. Then why did he reverse himself when writing his tale of the Holocaust, and suddenly looking like nothing so much as a "good European," find in that chaos fewer differences than resemblances, samenesses, even? Was he trying to be naive?

How explain Steiner's peculiar mixture of sophistication and naivete, his falling into the pattern of mistakenness I have described, and which, to all appearances, must have been earnestly solicited. To be sure, no one tries to fall into error, but error may come from striving for profundity—there is such a thing as living intellectually beyond one's means. Now from the very outset of his career, Steiner has tried to give the impression that he, Steiner, has thought darkly and deeply, that he has had weighty thoughts, depressing thoughts, the kind of thoughts one less thoughtful than he might soon have left off thinking. Let me read off some of Steiner's dark deep thoughts, culled from his main works and also from his uncollected literary reviews. Here they are: *Tragedy is dead. Also, better books will come out of the East than from the West, where there is the freedom the East lacks.* Isn't that a depressing thought for anyone who favors freedom? Another recently expressed—and false—dark thought: *Tragedy can make one deaf*

2. The details are just delicious. According to Eckermann, at Buchenwald Goethe asked him, "Did you know that the tree in whose shade we were so fond of resting is still inside the camp? That . . . is a typically German gesture, and one that I appreciate! Despite the terrible demands of war, that tree—which the officers and soldiers of this garrison continue to call 'Goethe's tree', which, no doubt, will not fail to raise the spirits of the wretches imprisoned here for various reasons—that tree has not been cut down." And again, "You see that inscription? *Jedem das Seine* . . . I find it most . . . encouraging. . . . For after all, what does it mean, 'To each his due'? Is it not an excellent model for a society organized to defend the freedom of all . . . to the detriment, if necessary, of an excessive, harmful, individual freedom?"

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to the crying of a child. I say the judgement is quite false, noting merely that Racine, having written *Phèdre*, felt obliged to draw up a program for the improvement of France. I come now to Steiner's judgement of Israel. Here, too, he has maintained his serious thinker's stance. He has thought of Israel the grievous, the emotion-disturbing thought, not the thought which soothes, but the thought which pains, and not just other Jews, but maybe even Steiner himself. And here is the thought: *The state of Israel was falsely set up. Its re-establishment in 1948 can only be called "spurious."* So the state of Israel has not been a beginning, and for Jews there has been only another ending. That ending appears in Steiner's *The Portage To San Cristobal of A. H.* It is the speech of Hitler which ends the narrative.

POSTSCRIPT

Very probably the matter for consideration here is more important than anything already considered. For here I want to take up Steiner's judgement of Israel, the re-establishment of which he has said is "spurious."

In the *Salmagundi* essay to which I referred before, Steiner makes a number of what might be termed casually pejorative judgements of Israel. The question is: do they add up to the judgement that Israel—or its re-establishment in 1948—is spurious? Could they be true without our having to make that judgement? And I want to ask this question, too: does Steiner *have* to make it?

Among Steiner's "casually pejorative" judgements of Israel are these: it is small, and it lies in the Middle East. Now the small size of Israel might be matter for regret, but certainly not that it is situated in Palestine, where David and Solomon ruled. Jews do not weep today as did the exiles, in Babylon, remembering Jerusalem. Today, if Jews want to weep, they can weep right in Jerusalem. Steiner has also made these judgements of Israel: it is "corrupt in its politics," and "shrill in its parochialism." Now I do not know if these remarks are valid, but even if true, they do not oblige one to think that Israel is, or its re-establishment was, "spurious." Steiner, of course, has other charges. It appears that Israel is ". . . a nation-state to the utmost degree." Now to be anything to the "utmost degree" is hardly to be "spurious," unless the entity in question is additionally said to be "spurious" to the "utmost degree," and this Steiner has not said. He does say this: "It is by empirical need that a nation-state sups on lies." Apparently this is true of all nation-states which are genuinely

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and not "spuriously" nation-states. So if the state of Israel "sups on lies," how does it differ at suppertime from the state of Switzerland, which Steiner does not tax with "spuriousness"? He might argue, though, that whatever its other faults Switzerland must be granted this: It is not, like Israel, "armed to the teeth" and is not like Israel ". . . compelled to make other men homeless, servile, disinherited, in order to survive from day to day . . .". Now in this charge there is more propaganda than truth. The Arabs who fled Palestine in 1948 refused the separate state the United Nations had offered them, and to which the victorious Zionists had agreed.

But the charges so far considered are just ancillary; they are not fundamental to Steiner's judgement. His real charge goes like this:

> The imperilled, brutalized condition of the present State of Israel, the failure of Israel to be Zion, prove the spurious, the purely expedient temporality of its re-establishment in 1948. There were then armed men about and politicians. The Messiah was nowhere in sight.

But having made this charge, Steiner goes on to grant that he personally has no right to make it. "I have no right," these are his own words. Why does he have no right to make a judgement of whose truth he is trying to persuade others? Again his own words: "I have no part in the beliefs and ritual practices which underwrite it." And then he contradicts himself once more. Of his own judgement, he writes, ". . . its intuitive and evidential strength can be felt to be real." But if that were so, he would have every right to his judgement, and would have felt no need to apologize for having made it.

Not sure that he has a right to make his real charge against Israel, Steiner is nonetheless sure that Jews everywhere should not regard as their "Homeland" the nation-state set up in Palestine in 1948. There is an alternative "Homeland," according to Steiner, for Jews. This alternative "Homeland" he tells us is "the text." One might think that what he has in mind is the Torah, but how can the Torah be identified with anything called "the text"? That term Steiner has taken from the writings of contemporary French critics who are radically skeptical and, in their permanent exile from any criterion of truth, have set up what they call "the text" as a pseudo-absolute. They may mumble, "There is only the text, and nothing but the text, so help us Text." But no religious Jew could join that *minyan*. In calling the text a "Homeland" Steiner has simply added to

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the term the connotations of truth and sacredness which believing Jews feel for the Torah, but which even the most fervent poststructuralists will not posit about "the text"; it is not something before which one prays; it is something one "deconstructs"!

Apparently Steiner does not realize that "the text" is important only to those intellectuals for whom truth is still an enigma, and the Torah, to someone who thinks like that, would be simply a set of nonsacred opinions, about which one must reserve judgement. The conceptions underlying realities such as "the Torah" and "the text" are not just incompatible; they exclude each other logically.

Steiner cites Julien Benda's remark in *The Treason of the Clerics* that the scholar's truth should be more important to him than his country; should he not sacrifice what is less to what is more important? Now Benda, by today's standards, was very old-fashioned. He had the old-fashioned belief that we know what we are talking about when we talk about the "truth." What is more, he did not have the new-fangled belief that we know what we are talking about when we talk about "the text." For Benda never wrote about "the text," nor can I imagine him listening with understanding to moderns or postmoderns talking about it. Even so, Benda did not say that truth is a homeland, a country, but only that to the intellectual, the scholar, truth should be more important. Truth first and then France, not France first, then truth. He never remotely suggested that the French nation, its farmers, workers, and statesmen—not just its scholars—put truth above the interests of France. Then how can Benda's judgement be applied to Israel, which like France is a nation, and has workers and farmers and statesmen, as well as scholars?

For some, the voice of the people is the voice of God; thus God, as Stephen Dedalus remarks in *Ulysses*, can be "a shout in the street." And Jews, shouting in the streets, but also in squares and in assemblies, have proclaimed the state set up in 1948 as the Homeland of the Jews. So for them the matter is settled. But for George Steiner it is not. The voice of God for him cannot be heard in "Long Live Israel," shouted by Jews. Putting truth above country, the voice of God for him has to be the voice of truth. The question remains: where can truth be heard? It can be heard by religious Jews when they read the Torah, but Steiner is not a religious Jew, so he cannot hear the truth reading it with them. He can in his mind secularize the Torah, and think of it as "the text," but in so thinking he must further think that what he reads there is untrue. So for Jews who

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have not yet decided on their Homeland, the alternatives are these: if Orthodox, they can call the Torah their Homeland and not think of it as a text; if secular, they can call Israel their Homeland, knowing it is not the same as Zion. But no Jew, religious or secular, can follow George Steiner, nor can Steiner follow himself. He still has to decide how it is possible to secularize the Torah and yet regard it as true, or how to make sacred the untrue text. Without bringing off one or the other of these impossible feats, there cannot be Homeland for him.

The
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at the
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Delmore Schwartz
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FICTION

Joyce Carol Oates

SURF CITY

His number finally came up, his good luck number, published in the *Surf City Gazette* and announced over the radio, he'd won $1,150 in the state lottery in which a retired grocer from Camden won $1,726,092 and somebody else, a woman schoolteacher from upstate, won $628,530. About time, he thought. Maybe even a few years behind schedule.

His name was Harvey Kubeck, he was thirty-one years old, had a two-year-old son and another baby on the way. Both pregnancies hadn't been planned but weren't exactly accidents either. Except for the weeks when he was laid off from work he made good money at Republic Steel: when they laid him off he got part-time work driving a truck for a local construction outfit, part-time work as a security guard (not licensed to carry a gun) at the shopping mall, short-term jobs with a tree service his wife's uncle owned, whatever came along. He'd never gone downtown to collect unemployment, no one in his family did. For a long time it had seemed to him that luck was running against him. It wasn't just the things you could put your finger on, talk about, it was how you felt about yourself, the air you had to breathe. In fact it seemed to him that his bad luck was like dirty water, stinking sewage water splashing around his head, his face, it sickened him to think he'd get it in his mouth and swallow it. Months and months of things going against you until finally it's years, you're thirty, then you're thirty-one, not a kid any longer.

He'd gone to parochial school so he knew the Church's teaching on luck, it was supposed to be nothing but pagan superstition, it was supposed to be ignorant; good Catholics didn't put their faith in anything but God. But Harvey knew when his luck was bad and he was being cheated, it was just instinct to know. In any case he didn't believe in the Church any longer, hadn't been able to swallow that shit

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since he was fifteen, sixteen years old, he'd been a wise guy then and had actually told one of the priests at the high school to go screw, his buddies remembered that to this day. The priests had expelled him for a month, his father'd had to plead with them to take him back. Now he tried not to think about religion at all. He'd be angry if he did so he tried not to think about it, stayed away from arguing with his family or his in-laws. He had a bad temper and the thing about a bad temper, his father always said, the dangerous thing, is that you lose it at the wrong time, you get the wrong people.

His wife Marian went to mass most Sundays, low mass at 10 A.M. said by an older priest who never took more than a half-hour. Harvey made remarks, Harvey made jokes, why the hell did she bother when she didn't believe in most of that crap, and Marian said, flaring up at once, "A human being has got to believe in something, so keep your mouth to yourself." He thought it was funny, that's all. He just had to laugh, that's all, people believing crap being shoved at them year after year, it'd been going on for thousands of years in fact, he was only making the observation.

Still, he went along with the family, wanted to have his kids baptized, you never could tell about things like that—it was a way of betting after all. He didn't, he told his buddies, want to fuck up things for his kids if the Church was maybe right.

These past few months he'd been coiled tight as a spring, distracted, irritable, not really himself. He'd light a cigarette and put it down somewhere and forget it, then light another, coughing in a new harsh way that sounded angry, his little boy ducked away with his hands over his ears which Harvey didn't like to see. Marian complained that he had a habit of working his mouth like he was arguing with someone, she wished he'd cut it out. It's really weird, she said, you should see yourself. He wasn't arguing with anybody, he knew that, but he did a lot of thinking, how it was time for his luck to change, he'd been laid off at the plant and rehired and laid off again and again rehired and these days you only knew from week to week how long you'd be working, it burnt his ass, he said, no overtime for anybody not even the guys with thirty years seniority. There was a rumor also that the plant itself might close and relocate in Kentucky, or was it Tennessee, one of those shithead states, another rumor that the owners were stockpiling, keeping it all quiet, in case of a strike.

What's the point of a strike, Harvey went around saying in a voice heavy with sarcasm, why not fire bomb the dump instead?—it'd add up to the same thing.

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It was hard for him to believe that he'd been there for almost six years now—he was still considered new, one of the younger men. He *was* new. Last time they laid him off with no clear promise of when he'd be called back Marian said, Honey just quit, tell them to go to hell, but he knew she didn't mean it, she'd worked before Paulie was born, waitressing mainly, sales clerking, she wasn't exactly eager to go back and now there was going to be another baby. Steel isn't the kind of job you walk away from, Harvey said. The pay scale was high. Also the benefits, the pension, all that, shit he'd have to be crazy to quit, he'd only wind up on unemployment and what then. . . ?

Much of the time he wore ear guards on the job, especially when he was welding, they had the strange effect of eliminating the little noises you never notice and emphasizing the big ones, the vibrations, that is, the feel of the noises. It was really weird: he actually found himself listening, trying to figure out what he heard. For a while he monkeyed around with his walkman to fix it so that he could listen to good loud rock music from the Surf City station, the ear phones under the ear guards, but it didn't work out, all the sounds came scrambled in together. After an hour his head buzzed and his jaws ached from clenching, he could get high, he thought, from wearing the ear guards themselves, then he'd go smoke a joint in the lavatory and everything would go floating, so weird there was no way to describe it.

Even at home he got into the habit of going around coiled tight, almost in a crouch, as if he was waiting for something to happen, some loud noise or surprise. His skin was hot and flushed, it was the blood beating inside, an artery throbbing in his forehead which was almost identical to an artery in his father's forehead he'd always hated since he was a young kid. His hair was a dark red clayey color bleaching out fair in the summer months, wavy, worn a little long, sideburns he kept trimmed. His shoulders and arms were muscular but there was a roll of fat around his waist Marian teased him about. He didn't know what his weight was, exactly, but he knew he couldn't be overweight, he wasn't the type.

He was good looking as he'd ever been, Marian said, except for that habit of his, working his mouth like he was talking to himself or arguing with someone. Curling his lip at people when he really meant to smile. "You're getting to be some kind of asshole, sometimes," Marian said, pouting as if she'd been insulted. "Your mind's always off somewhere."

He'd take it light, wouldn't lose his temper, maybe make a joke

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or two like a t.v. comic with his timing down so perfect he doesn't even wait for laughs. But she just stared at him. Wouldn't smile, wouldn't give an inch. Pretending to be as dumb as one of her own asshole girl friends who couldn't tell whether Harvey Kubeck was coming on to her or playing her for laughs.

When news came that he'd won $1,150 in the lottery Harvey didn't talk it up, went around acting as if he wasn't that surprised at winning, even that happy, at first, though he got happier when the shock wore off. He got a lot happier. The first night Marian looked at him and said, "How come you aren't more excited?—you didn't even call many people," and he shrugged, embarrassed, cigarette in his mouth, he said, "'Cause I figured it was coming." He said, his face burning, "I figured it's been coming for a fucking long time."

Next morning and the mornings that followed Harvey woke and before he even opened his eyes or wondered what time it was or what day of the week, did he have to work or not, he was thinking: This is more like it, Kubeck.

He said aloud, staring at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, the ruddy skin, the quizzical eyes, turning his head from side to side, slowly, pondering, admiring: This is the way it was meant to be.

Basically, he thinks, he's a happy contented person. Things have always gone well for him: he got through school, got through the National Guard, married the woman he wanted, has a baby boy he loves—in fact he's crazy about Paulie, really eats him up, when he has the time to concentrate. He isn't a loser, he isn't one of those poor bastards (he knows plenty, in his own family even) who fuck up everything they try. Just the past two or three years when his luck has been running against him. Or is it four years, five?—the steel business in trouble and trying to blame the union. Something in the air he breathes, the way the sky looks when he happens to glance up, the way food tastes, nothing you can put your finger on but you know it's there, you know you're being cheated. He'd look at himself in a mirror in some lavatory somewhere, late Saturday night in Surf City, he'd been drinking whiskey and beer and none of it had done much good, out with his buddies, Marian was home or over at her mother's house with Paulie, he'd take a look at that face and think, Who the hell's *that*, I don't want nothin' to do with *that*.

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But basically he's a happy person. His mother used to tell people what a sweet little boy he'd been, not crying much, making up games for himself, crap like that, Harvey doesn't remember any of it but he knows it's true. He knew when his luck was due to change even when he felt lousy with a morning hangover or when he was laid off again at the plant or when the telephone rang and he let Marian answer it because he felt too tired just then to answer it himself. (Who would it be? One of his in-laws maybe, or someone in his own family. Asking for a favor like all Harvey was was a strong arm, a back to carry out furniture or something. Or they'd be complaining. Wanting to commiserate with Marian, maybe. As if he wasn't right there in his own house trying not to listen. Sons of bitches, the fuckers, his blood beat hard and hot and heavy, he'd had enough of them all.) So when news came about the lottery he wasn't that surprised. Some of his family and in-laws came over to celebrate, they had a few beers, things to eat, his father took Polaroid pictures of Harvey holding up the check from the State of New Jersey Treasury, Harvey and Marian with their arms around each other, Harvey with little Paulie climbing in his lap, but it was like Harvey was really standing off to one side watching, thinking his own thoughts. So his luck had changed, well it was about time.

The sons of bitches.

Marian was expecting the baby in early November, now it was almost the end of the summer, the lottery money had come at the right time. The pregnancy hadn't been planned exactly but when Harvey got over his surprise he said he felt good about it, he felt right. Still, every few nights Marian would say, You aren't really happy about it, are you? and Harvey would say at once, What?—sure I'm happy. And Marian would say angrily, I know *you*, your mind's a thousand miles away. She'd rub her knuckles hard against his head until he stopped her. It's half your baby, isn't it, damn you, she'd say, and Harvey would say, kidding, Honey I can't vouch for *that*, and she'd get angrier, maybe try to slap him, they'd wrestle around for a while then go to bed, there he'd fit himself into her like a hand into a glove just tight enough, or maybe it was a shoehorn, a shoehorn and a satiny silky high-heeled shoe, she clutched at him and mashed her mouth against him as she usually did, it was clear sailing, Harvey thought, past a certain point, and then his mind

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floated clear, floated and floated, clear, a thousand no a million miles away.

* * *

The last time Harvey had won anything it was $40 on the Sugar Ray Leonard—Tom Hearns welterweight match, three, four years ago, just a bet with an older guy at work and nothing to brag about but he'd felt good for weeks; it was something to focus his thoughts on when he was low. Then the memory faded and he had to make an effort to remember what it was that had felt so good.

The $40 had disappeared right away. He spent it all before he got home that night.

(A long time ago when he was sixteen or seventeen he'd thought maybe he might become a professional boxer: fooled around at the Y one winter, planned on trying out for the Golden Gloves lightweight division, but nothing came of it in the end. His mind was quick but for some reason his fists were slow. He never really learned footwork. He fought a defensive fight, hadn't much instinct for going out after his opponent. The coach liked him and said he'd be known as "Iron Man" Kubeck if he ever got the knack, he could absorb as much punishment as any of the guys his age and size in the gym, but no one made much effort to encourage him and eventually he lost interest. So he admired great boxers like Sugar Ray but he always felt a secret thrill, almost a taste of satisfaction, when they got knocked down and hurt bad and the camera showed how stunned they were, how for a split second or maybe longer they didn't know where the fuck they were or what had happened to them. Now you know what it's like, Harvey would think. Though in his half-dozen serious matches at the Y he'd never been knocked down so hard he couldn't get back up on his feet again.)

This time, with the money he won, he wanted to concentrate more. He thought maybe he'd divide it up . . . some for Marian, some for his parents, some for the loan company (he still owed about half the list price on the Impala he'd bought two years back), some for himself, and some for a night on the town with his buddies. They'd drive up to Shore Acres Beach and work their way down, back to Surf City, he'd treat them all to oysters, pizza, corn on the cob, all the beer and drinks they wanted, what the hell. But also he wanted to surprise Marian and Paulie with a new color t.v., nineteen inches,

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console model, and with the trade-in on the old one that would still be how much? — $800 maybe, he'd have to check. Which was a lot of money. And there'd be the doctor and hospital bills for the new baby, and Marian was always complaining about the refrigerator, it's wearing out, it isn't big enough, and the linoleum in the kitchen looks like hell, and so on and so forth. It was starting to make him sick, thinking of all these things. It was starting to make him angry, that buzz in his head, something beating in his forehead, maybe he should just take the plunge and spend the money however he wanted. But then Marian would be mad. She'd be seriously mad. And he was frightened of her in one of those states especially now that she was pregnant again and if she came at him with her nails or fists, or kicking, kneeing, he couldn't even protect himself, the last time he'd tried, he'd slapped her twice, and Paulie had started bawling, and there was hell to pay for a solid week. She really made him eat shit, the woman knew how to do it. So he wanted to give her $500, let's say. And $500 for his parents. They could use it, they were maybe even expecting it, he didn't want to disappoint them. So that was $1,000 right there: leaving him $150 which was nothing. Which would hardly pay for a night on the town. And there was the loan company. And there was — what else?

Those sons of bitches, he thought suddenly — they'd given him one of the little crap prizes instead of $1 million or $700,000 or even $50,000. Or $10,000. And being given one of the little crap prizes meant, what? — *he'd never get one of the big prizes now.*

Some days he felt so queer, so numb, it wasn't even himself, it was the way he'd felt at the National Guard camp where you just wanted to get drunk or stoned or stay in the shower running the water hot until it was all over and you could go back to real life. Other days, though, he felt good: people were still congratulating him, acting as if they envied him. He shrugged his shoulders, looked away, muttered something about not being one of the big prize winners, but nobody seemed to care. The point was he'd won, hadn't he. That was the point.

He realized it was an asshole idea to divide the money up as he'd planned. So one Friday evening after work he went to Sears like it was Christmas Eve and bought a refrigerator for Marian, avocado green, self-defrosting, and an eight-ounce bottle of Chanel No. 5 for Marian, and a red tricycle for Paulie, and he made a sizeable down

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payment on a nineteen-inch t.v., a Westinghouse, top of the line the salesman said, with a carved mahogany cabinet. And Marian and Paulie were as happy as if it was Christmas. And Marian only said afterward, in bed, that she hoped he was going to save something, there'd be the hospital bills etcetera and they didn't have a whole lot in the bank, but she spoke almost shyly and didn't press the point when Harvey didn't respond. And when they went over to his parents' on Sunday Harvey took his dad off to the side and slipped him an envelope with a check for $350 in it. This is class, Harvey thought, keeping calm while his father thanked him, and then his mother, this is high style, Harvey thought, not showing off, just doing it as if it was something you did every Sunday just about.

And just as Marian assured him, the $350 meant as much to his parents as $500 would have meant. The idea was the gift. The sentiment behind it. They understood, didn't they, that Harvey had to be thinking of the new baby, that he owed on the car, etcetera, he wasn't a millionaire who could throw his money around. In fact Harvey's parents seemed pleased and surprised to get the check as if they hadn't been expecting anything from him at all.

"The point is, hon, you're generous to them," Marian said. "You're the best they have and they know it."

"Sure," Harvey said, frowning, embarrassed, "—*okay*," he said, cutting the discussion short. But he liked what Marian said and he knew it was true. He *was* generous. He wanted to be more generous yet, he wanted to show people how generous he really could be, suddenly he felt excited, a little dazed, it was like the sensation he had when he'd had a few beers somewhere then walked out into the cold, some winter night—left the smoky noisy barroom and walked outside with his jacket open, bareheaded, blinking with the surprise of the cold and the stillness, his breath beginning to steam. Eyes opening wide and clear. The way the cold air hits the lungs, slicing right in. The way it feels in the nostrils. Jesus Christ, Harvey thinks, blinking, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, this is it, isn't it?—standing there smiling, dazed, squinting up at the stars.

He even sent a "floral display"—red and yellow roses, white carnations, mums of various colors, daisies—across town to his mother-in-law. Just for the hell of it. Just to give the old woman a thrill, and Marian a real surprise.

He was really himself now, he was really getting in stride.

* * *

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Labor Day weekend, Harvey treated Marian and Paulie and Paulie's three-year-old cousin Ben (Harvey's older sister's kid) to a day at the beach: not Surf City which was getting tacky but Cohasset Bay where they could drive out to the old lighthouse. The lottery money was nearly gone, in fact it really was gone, but what the hell, it was a great day, the kids loved it, Marian said she felt like a kid again herself, lazing around all afternoon on a beach towel, listening to music, oiling herself, having a nap or two in the sun. She'd have preferred it that Harvey's sister came along but little Ben wasn't too much trouble, the boys were occupied in wading in the surf, chasing gulls, monkeying in the sand with their pails and shovels, the only problem for her, it wasn't really a problem, was that the wind blew so hard, you got tired walking into it or even standing up for long. . . . Harvey thought the wind was a good thing, it kept things healthy, the muggy air blown away. All afternoon he kept looking at Paulie, and he kept looking at Marian, he was feeling happy, sly, laughing to himself for no reason he knew, he *was* a generous man, people were probably talking about him. It was nothing for a millionaire to give away money: the whole thing, the context, was different for a man basically without a lot of money but with a generous spirit.

Marian had curly black hair, a skin that tanned olive-dark, on the beach she wore white-rimmed plastic sunglasses that made her look like some movie star, not twenty-nine years old but twenty at the most, her belly swollen just a little out, her breasts too looking swollen, held tight in the tiny bikini top with the thin straps. She'd shaved under her arms that morning and seemed to be lifting her arms more than usual, yawning, stretching luxuriously, Harvey remembered how in high school he'd stared secretly at the girls to see if they had hair under their arms or if they'd shaved it off, and he and the other boys would joke about it, also if a girl had begun to shave her legs, and if a girl hadn't, and you could see the hairs, you'd call out in a weird voice *Hair-ry legs!* and everybody would crack up while the girl wouldn't have a clue what the joke was; or, if she did, she'd be too ashamed to let on.

Marian noticed him looking at her, she didn't mind being stared at when she looked good and she knew she looked good today, she gave him a certain mock-smile, curling her lip in a way that was supposed to mimic him, she wriggled her shoulders, her ass, he was squatting down doing something with Paulie and he got vague with what he was doing, just looking at her, it was almost as if she wasn't

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his wife yet, they weren't married yet, just out on the beach for an afternoon, rock music on the transistor, his buddies and their girlfriends somewhere close by, beer in the cooler but the ice was melting, the sun was getting too hot or maybe wasn't hot enough, the sky was getting mottled, it looked like rain maybe, the sky bruising up to rain, except the wind was so rough it might blow the rain away: and there was Marian Boci looking at him, coming on to him, out here with all these people around, he knew what she was thinking and she knew he knew, he'd get hard just with staring at her, or not even staring at her but thinking about her, Marian Boci sticking her tongue in his mouth like it was a joke or a trick, giggling and shoving at him, drunk, or pretending to be drunk, all the guys thought she was just great, all the guys envied Harvey Kubeck and he said, Yeh you better believe it, Marian's hot.

He'd thought too, off and on before they were married, before things got straightened out between them and she was still going around with other guys, he'd thought something might happen, something terrible but necessary, one night he'd lose control and drive his car into a bridge railing or something, Marian screaming next to him, or worse yet he'd just kill her: strangle her: he thought about it a lot.

There was an older guy who'd doused his girl with gasoline and lit a match to her, then doused himself and did the same thing—and Harvey thought about doing that too with Marian, not all the time but sometimes, when they quarreled or she wasn't talking to him on the telephone or he heard about her going out with another guy, it wasn't a serious thought like the other, and nothing came of any of it, she saw things his way eventually, she understood they were meant for each other and that was that.

What stayed with him from the Cohasset Bay beach, what really got to him, was the sand sculptures Paulie and Ben and some other little kids made. He hadn't even been paying all that much attention then Paulie led him over, and here was this fish, they said it was a dolphin, maybe five feet long, one foot high, the goddamndest lifelike thing, with fins and gills and eyes and a mouth, and all around it they'd made little hard-packed things of sand from turning sand pails upside down, it just hit Harvey that this was a work of art, he got the camera and took some pictures, the kids clowning around but really proud, Paulie's daddy looming over them.

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He said to Marian, who was impressed too, that it was a shame to leave the thing behind on the beach, nobody else'd appreciate it. Big kids would probably trample it down. "Well," Marian said, yawning a little, raising her arms to stretch, "—Paulie's like you, hon, he's got a real imagination."

Next weekend, Saturday night, he treated his buddies like he'd been saying he would, though the lottery money was all gone and in fact he had to borrow a little back from his father, it was a secret between him and the old man and nobody else was going to know. Marian especially who was acting worried about what she called the "future."

They got a late start, 9 P.M., supper at the Lobster Shanty then over to Gill's for a few beers, then down to the Windjammer where there was a punk rock band none of the guys liked, then they drove across the bay to Lenape Sound where there was a tavern run by some guy they knew, and as soon as Harvey stepped inside he felt at home, he felt great, it wasn't 'cause he'd been drinking all night, it was just a feeling you had, the right kind of atmosphere, even the noise the right level, some friendly place where things were lively too and your interest would be kept up. It was Stan and Jacky and Fritz and Pete. And Harvey. Who insisted upon treating. Round after round. They had whiskey, they had draft beer, they had tequilas. Marian said to telephone her around twelve, so she'd know he was okay, and when was he coming home, but he kept putting it off, then he couldn't find the telephone the bartender directed him to, then when he found it it was out of order or something, his two dimes just kept being returned. Fishing them out Harvey thought something was weird, then he thought, he realized, he wasn't angry at the telephone as he would have been most nights, some other night he might have tried to rip it from the wall, no he just felt it was all some kind of joke, he'd ride with the joke, he was feeling so good, riding so high, he wasn't about to let some fucking out-of-order telephone get him down. The point is, he thought, his twenty cents was returned —little things like that were part of his new good luck.

He weaved a little coming back into the bar but he wasn't drunk, he didn't have any trouble finding his buddies though the place was crowded. There were Jacky and Pete in some kind of discussion with a big heavy guy in a t-shirt, *Harley-Davidson Sarasota Florida* on the back, nobody Harvey knew, he was maybe thirty-five years old wear-

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ing his hair in a ponytail, going to fat, the shoulders, the small of the back, even the neck, weighed two hundred twenty pounds at least, a girl next to him maybe eighteen years old, hair like broom sage and wearing sunglasses in the bar, leaning against his big arm. Harvey came over ready to buy them all another round, ready to be introduced, the big guy's name was Terry and Jacky seemed to know him, but it turned out it wasn't any kind of friendly discussion, it was actually an argument, about somebody Terry knew that Jacky also knew, ran a gas station in Atlantic City, maybe, Harvey couldn't follow it except he knew right away that Terry was the kind of asshole he'd like to smash with his fists, you'd just like to see a wise guy fucker like that laid out somewhere dead, wipe the grin off his face, put some respect in his eyes, the fear of the Lord as Harvey's father said.

The argument continued for a while, Terry was calling Jacky fuckface, and Harvey said to Terry go fuck yourself, and the bartender who was listening who seemed to be a friend of Fritz's or maybe a cousin, Harvey'd been introduced when they first came in but hadn't exactly heard, he came over and told them to keep it down please, he said to Terry maybe he'd better move on, there's lots of places on the strip and it was still early. So Terry and his girl left after a few minutes, Terry told them all to go to hell, go fuck themselves, bunch of assholes, etcetera, but he kept on moving, the girl had to hurry after him in her high-heeled shoes and she looked scared.

So that happened, but again it was weird, Harvey didn't feel angry he felt instead like it was all part of his life now, him being out with his buddies, everybody having a good time, the way he'd planned it in his head almost from the first hour when the news came about the lottery, thinking of a place like this, maybe not in Lenape Sound 'cause he wasn't familiar with it like he was with Surf City, but a place like this, him and his buddies, Pete and Stan and Jacky and Fritz, then there was Gary who couldn't make it 'cause they were going out of town or something, he felt bad that Gary wasn't with them but just for a second or a half-second, already the thought floated away and his good happy feeling returned, Jacky was making them all crack up with what he was saying about the guy with the ponytail, Harvey decided on another tequila and the bartender smiled at him, said, Harv this is on me, okay? and he felt that kick of something special, something just right, meant only for him, some kind of secret. Nah, he said, I can pay for it, but the bartender insisted, so he gave in, then they were all eating oysters, the second time that

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night, then Harvey was having trouble with the cigarette machine, laughing 'cause his coins weren't being returned this time, but a little pissed-off too, starting to punch at the machine, a few kicks, one of his buddies pulled him away saying forget it: Harv could bum a cigarette from him anytime he wanted.

They left that bar, drove a mile or two down the Bay Road to another place, big parking lot practically in the dunes, music inside, somebody else was driving Harvey's Impala now which irritated him a little but he didn't intend to get in a fight right now, he'd make his point later when they drove back to Surf City. This place, the atmosphere took getting used to, too many customers pushing around the bar, too many women maybe, couples trying to dance and getting bumped into, a lot of noise, but Harvey felt good after his first draft beer or two, his buddies were flying high just like him, lots of wise guy stuff and laughing, almost choking with laughter, Fritz telling them how Harv had told Father Donahue to go screw, they'd heard it a hundred times already but it always cracked them up. Harvey thought he saw the big guy with the ponytail, he thought he saw him and the girl on the other side of the room, but then he lost them, forgot about them, he was bumming cigarettes which he'd light and drop on the floor, once he burnt his fingers with somebody's lighter, how the fuck it happened he couldn't figure out, those things were safety proof. Harvey was thinking he liked this bar as well as the other one, maybe better. He felt at peace. But well he felt excited too. It was hard to put your finger on—things going the way they were supposed to go. The way they were meant. Like the satisfaction seeing a river or something running along, or even raindrops rolling down a windshield, it could fascinate you, it was hard to say why, Harvey saw the sky bunching up over the Surf City beach and the first raindrops pelting and the thunder sounding and there's that good clean fresh air, that almost surprising air, just before a storm, and he and the other kids ran like hell down the beach, yelling and laughing, trying to outrace the storm, the raindrops hitting like bullets, older people scrambling around putting away their beach crap, gathering up their kids, assholes acting like lightning was going to strike them the next minute.

He saw then that that guy with the ponytail *was* there in the bar, the girl with him, but they hadn't noticed Harvey and his friends. Actually they were on their way out, the girl had her sunglasses slid atop her head, pressing close against him with her arm through his,

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the guy gave a look around the room, a last look, but he still didn't see Harvey and his friends. The son of a bitch, Harvey thought. Who are you calling fuckface, fuckface?—you're dead, Harvey thought, putting down his glass of draft beer.

The girl wasn't any eighteen either, probably Marian's age, heavy makeup on her face and black stuff on her eyes, her ass wriggling in some kind of a silky play suit, really short shorts, bare legs and those high-heeled shoes: a real slut.

Harvey poked his buddies and said Look, and they looked, and he said Want to get him? and they were sort of indecisive and Harvey said Let's go, and they paid up at the bar, and followed the two out into the parking lot, it was good luck, Harvey thought, the bastard's motorcycle was parked way down at the end, way down, almost in the dunes. Harvey started in trotting, he wasn't even going to wait for his buddies, he felt so good, the whole night had been moving toward this, weeks and weeks, half his life, like a river running fast, his heart fast too, he knew enough not to call out any kind of warning, not even to bother calling the bastard a name, the trainer at the Y had said don't waste that rush you get, that good strong feeling, that's some kind of chemical or hormone, adrenaline, now you're going to need it and now you think maybe you're scared but remember you're *not*, you're just getting ready to fight. When it hits them there's lots of guys that panic or start talking too fast but don't you ever make that mistake, just ride with the feeling, okay?—just ride with it, let it carry you along, that good strong feeling, someday maybe it's going to save your life.

And when you're in the ring don't ever feel sorry for your opponent 'cause why the hell should you, he's your opponent and he's out for your ass.

So Harvey got first to the guy, just started swinging, the girl screamed, the guy shouted something and tried to block Harvey's fist but Harvey got him square in the face, left cheekbone, so hard his knuckles felt like they were broken but the hurt just faded away at once. Now the bastard was backing away crouched, now Harvey could see the sick pleading look in his eyes, Harvey got him next in the gut, that big soft fat gut, a real belly blow that doubled him over, any referee that saw that the fucking fight would be over right now and Kubeck through for the season, but there wasn't any referee, just Harvey and the guy with the ponytail, trying to use his fists, trying even to use a knee, he swung clumsily at Harvey and Harvey just

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danced aside, knowing to do some quick peppery jabbing with his left, a hard uppercut with his right, shit it felt like his whole hand was broken now but he didn't give a damn, didn't have time to worry, the guy stumbled backward, fell to his knees, Harvey used his knee to get him in the face, there was blood streaming out of his nose and mouth, now Fritz and Pete were trying to pull Harvey away but he just shrugged them off, nobody was going to stop him, it was between him and his opponent and nobody was going to stop him, How d'you like it now, fuckface, Harvey said, okay you motherfucker, Harvey was saying, the air felt so good from the ocean, the wind so fresh and clean in his lungs, he was just getting higher and higher like his heart could burst with wanting to laugh, nobody was going to stop him now after so long.

The guy had fallen, even in the half-light from the parking lot Harvey could see he was bleeding pretty bad, the pavement and the sand were going dark by his head, then there were some headlights, then they heard a car door slam, Fritz said, Harv come *on*, but whoever it was wasn't coming any closer, they just weren't about to see what was going on by the dunes and Harvey knew ahead of time that that was how it was: he just knew. So he said Here's one for the road, sucker, bringing his fist down hard on the back of the guy's neck like he was doing karate and wanted to break it. One of his buddies was keeping the girl quiet, the others were trying to stop him, he felt so weird, so certain of himself, he just kept punching, kicking, he kicked anywhere he could, the guy's head, the guy's fat belly, he was laughing saying How's it feel now you son of a bitch, wiping his mouth with his forearm, How's it feel now you cocksucker, something jumped in his mind and he was thinking for a second he had on steel-toed shoes like at work but of course he hadn't, these were just his regular shoes, summer shoes, loafers Marian had made him get, they were oyster-white and pretty stylish, supposed to be Italian but not expensive like the real kind, he'd bought them at the mall back in June before he ever guessed that his luck would be changing and his whole life would be turned around.

* * *

There was some confusion about getting back home, who was going to drive who, they'd come in two cars, Harvey's and Pete's, but finally he got home, it was 3:20 A.M. and there was Marian watching television, dressed for bed and barefoot, her face oily with cream.

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He could tell she was angry but she was frightened too which made him feel better toward her, he shrugged her off when she came over, asking right away about his hand though he was hiding it, asking if he'd been in a fight, he went past her into the kitchen and got a beer from the refrigerator, pulled off the ring and tossed it somewhere, Marian was pulling at his arm, saying he was drunk, saying he was cockeyed drunk and not to wake Paulie, her voice was low and flat and accusing but he could tell she was scared. He just shoved her out of the way and went into the bathroom.

He was in there a while, five minutes, ten, he heard the telephone ringing but it was only his head, a good loud buzzing like Quaaludes but he couldn't remember having taken any that night, unless it was back at that place before the last place where the bartender gave him a drink on the house, hell of a nice guy, that was a place he intended to go back to, some cousin or somebody of Fritz's, but mainly he thought it must be just what he'd drunk and how good he felt from messing up that son of a bitch with the ponytail, Harley-Davidson t-shirt, big black bike, the works, and the girl gone crazy thinking her boyfriend was dead which anybody could see he wasn't: not crawling around like he was and making noises like he was, puking into the sand, puke and blood, the son of a bitch.

When he came out of the bathroom Marian said in that low voice, "Barbara just called," meaning Pete's wife, and Harvey didn't bother replying, got his shoes off with a grunt, pulled his shirt off over his head without taking time to unbutton it, his fingers were getting too numb to work the buttons, he was suddenly very tired and ready for bed, and Marian pulled at his arm, Marian said, "She says there was some trouble tonight," but he just pushed her away, not hard, just out of his way. She said, "Was there?"

He was rubbing his face with the shirt. Waves of exhaustion like he'd been working overtime, two hours overtime, could hardly keep from keeling over, but there were waves of something else too, short quick stabbing waves, excitement, elation, the knowledge of something secret. He could smell Marian's hair and the stale powdery scent of her underarms. The special rayony smell of that shortie nightgown of hers with the lace top. Her mouth was close to his ear, her breath was hot and accusing, she said again, "Was there? Harvey? Was there?" and he said, "Was there what?" She was so close, he hadn't expected her so close, he reached around and grabbed hold of her ass, she gave him a slap, told him again not to wake Paulie, did he

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know what time it was, he could feel himself getting hard though he was almost too tired to keep his eyes open, stumbling to the bed and hauling Marian with him, she gave him a real slap on the side of the face so that his ear stung, he fell laughing onto the bed not giving a damn if the bedsprings broke, "C'mon shut up an' get to bed," he said, it really turned him on that Marian was always pushing him, seeing how far she could go with him, he wouldn't want some wife like his brother had or his brother-in-law or half the guys he knew, scared to death they were going to get it in the face, too scared even to cry, Marian *was* scared but she kept at him, her eyes showing white the way they did, "Look Harvey, was there trouble?—I want to know," she asked, and he said, "No there was not."

She said something he didn't catch, then she was drawing off her bathrobe, he had to watch her through his fingers because of the light that hurt his eyes, he liked that nightgown of hers that was a queer translucent aqua color, wide lacy straps like something a little girl might wear, lace bodice you could see through in the right light, he knew suddenly that the baby was going to be a girl and he knew that was right, that balanced things out, there would be Paulie and there would be Paulie's baby sister, that was the way it would work out, he'd bet a thousand dollars, his luck was going to hold.

The nightgown clung with static electricity to Marian's belly and buttocks, and seeing his face, his eyes, she turned slightly away, intimidated, maybe, or embarrassed. She could see things in his face, Harvey knew, he could never see himself.

In the dark he went for her, wordless. Marian resisted, then gave in, murmuring something he couldn't make out, she had to lift her hips, she had to help him get inside her, they were both breathing hard, then Harvey was pumping himself into her, his jaws clenched, his eyes shut tight, he hadn't known he was so hot, so urgent, his heartbeat so fast. Marian held his sides tight with her knees as she sometimes did, holding him back, trying to hold him back, so in his plunge he wouldn't squeeze her belly and breasts, wouldn't hurt her. She was whispering something, she closed her fingers in his hair but he paid no attention, he was panting, grunting, then suddenly it was over—that flame coursing through his groin and belly that always astonished him, it was so strong, so powerful, it was familiar but it always astonished him, knocked the breath out of him as if he'd been kicked. Then he was lying by himself in the damp sheets and Marian was in the bathroom, a narrow sliver of light, water running in the

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distance, or maybe it was the surf, the waves breaking, a waterfall, a cascade of water sparkling in the sun, suddenly he is sinking in a slow turn, weightless, wordless, a deep deep turning, now he hardly needs to breathe because it is all being done for him, he is turning slow into a dark pool of water secret beneath the crashing waterfall, this is his place, this is his secret, deep beyond dreaming, floating free, and here, here suddenly he is.

Robert A. Rosenstone

CHAIM BAER

There is a man who comes swimming into history. He first appears in the middle of the Pruth River during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The exact date is impossible to determine, but certainly it is in the late Victorian period, though he knows nothing about that sort of label. Before he plunges headlong into the waters, or gingerly steps into the waters, there is little to know about him, little that can ever be discovered. He kept no diary and told no tales that his children would ever remember. The waters of the river cleansed him, washed away his past. Like some offbeat version of the Venus myth, he arises naked and full grown, innocent of history. His wisdom, if any, is water wisdom, the wisdom of currents and sea foam. He is not quite self-made, but certainly he is more than the creation of some God's weary imagination.

The next twenty-five, perhaps thirty years, find the man-who-swims-into-history living in Moldavia. His tongue, trained to the disparate sounds of Yiddish, Russian, and Hebrew, can never quite adjust to the soft, Latin vocal of the native language. The wife he acquires is fluent in Polish. His children, the three boys and four girls

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Editor's Note: This is the first chapter of a book-length work in progress.

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who live to maturity, grow up speaking Romanian. If he must communicate with natives through a heavy accent and an impoverished vocabulary, it does not matter. Even in the Yiddish shared with the family, he has little to say. There may be words in him, but they are not the kind spoken with the mouth. They are voiced with the language of the body, the bowels, the eyes.

One means of communication is with the scissors and sewing machine, in a language that also crossed the river. He is a skilled tailor, far different from most small town practitioners who patch together the threadbare remains of worried lives. His hands are comfortable creating new suits. They know the feel of fine cloth, woven in far-off English mills; they understand instinctively the cut of a jacket, drape of a coat, turn of a lapel and angled fall of trousers that make even a poor man feel, on a special day of wedding, bar mitzvah or other holiness, like a king. In any religious theory, a man should not take pride in the ephemeral of outward appearance. But his hands know the wisdom of this world, the instinctive blessing that exists outside the pages of any sacred text.

Life in Romania all those years is quiet, regular, tuned to an unvarying pattern of seasons, holidays. Flights of birds, the sowing of corn, clouds rumbling into rain, the annual festival of ripe grapes, the visit of gypsies—none of these change from year to year. The man who swims into history fits into the cycle. He is quiet, too, perhaps even timid. His only vice is gambling. He is never known to question the customs and laws that circumscribe his days. Naturally he takes part in the ceremonies of the small Jewish community, but never with much enthusiasm or faith. His children never see him as angry, upset, authoritarian, but they feel his emotional wires are somehow crossed. When it is time to discipline a youngster, he smiles sheepishly and disappears. The task always falls upon the strong forearm of his wife. In moments of sadness or tragedy, even death, he unaccountably grins, sometimes breaks into soft laughter. Then, as if ashamed at the inappropriate response, he vanishes from the house.

After the swim, he never travels much. Business can take him to the regional center of Bacau, but there is no evidence of visits to the former Moldavian capital, Jassy, or of journeys to Bucharest, less than two hundred miles away. His decision around the turn of the century to leave for America may be as much of a surprise to the family as to neighbors. He goes by boat, no doubt from the port of Constanza into the Black Sea. The view from steerage is not good. Perhaps a glimpse of domes and minarets, draped across Constanti-

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nople's seven hills, or of the massive fortified rock that preserved the Mediterranean for the English sovereign. Mainly the voyage is dark water, dark bulkheads, dark food and the dark breath of fellow passengers. He gets as far as Ellis Island, then is turned away, presumably for not having enough landing money. A ship drops him in a French port, and for a year he lives in Paris. Rarely does he write letters home.

The next time there is money for everyone. Passing on a train or in a streetcar, or stopped in station in either France or England, the family is assaulted with the violent, incomprehensible words of street urchins, who hurl clods of dung along with insults. The future becomes a lottery spun by some seasick god of the shipping lines and lanes; they await the first ship to either Canada or Argentina. They land in a city buried in white snowbanks higher than the tallest mid-teen child. By the time the sky melts into blue and bright wild flowers spring out all over the mountain that rises in the middle of Montreal Island, a dim apartment is home. As before, mother is in the kitchen much of the time, but life for the children is different. There is no garden to tend, no cow to milk. The boys have scattered into the streets, and the sounds of English are becoming familiar in their mouths. The girls feel a swelling somewhere below the waist and somewhere above the waist as they hang by the iron stairways that curve gracefully from second story duplexes to the sidewalk. They are beginning to distinguish between their brothers and other men.

The man-who-swims-into-history remains silent. He speaks neither of Russia, Romania or the New World, says nothing about past or future, never discusses the Pruth River, the Black Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Seine or the St. Lawrence. He works not for himself, but in a shop with other men, and his hands seem less graceful, agile, expressive. It is tempting to believe that in this silence he is preparing a message for his children, and the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of all immigrants. Such words cannot come easily or quickly. First there is the matter of a lump on his head, an old companion that has made every journey with him. The operation is routine. He leaves his family for a single night in the kind of hospital none of them had ever seen in Romania. It is less than a year since the arrival in Canada. After the lump has been removed and a bandage is wrapped tightly around his head, he never seems quite well. At home and at work he is dizzy, tired. A few days after the operation he comes home, goes to bed and never gets up again. With the family gathered around, his last words are a feeble, "Take care of your

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mother." The man-who-swims-into-history has floated out without leaving any message. One must look for any message back in the waters of the Pruth, in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, in the storms of the English Channel and the hurricanes that sweep the Atlantic seaboard, in breakers off the coast of California and typhoons that slam out of the South Pacific onto the islands of Japan. For a man who swims into it, history must exist in water or not at all.

* * *

It is very difficult for a later generation to accept that a history, a biography can begin mysteriously in midstream. There always was a before and a before and a before that. There always is a past to be discovered. Locked away in the basements of stone buildings in Moscow or Kishinev, Odessa or Leningrad or Cracow, there are dossiers, documents, certificates, record books, registries, petitions, scrolls, mountains of damp records awaiting the love that will drag them into the sunlight. Enough time, enough patience, enough diligence, enough training, enough work, enough language skill, enough stubbornness, enough imagination or lack of imagination and enough of a grant from some foundation, university or secret or public government agency, and the past will return with all the certainty of iron bars.

It is no easier for a historian to accept a biography that begins in midstream. The swimmer's grandson was a historian. In theory he solved mysteries, shed light on the unseen corners of the past. But he could not unravel the mystery of the swimmer. He could not even solve the problem of why he wanted to solve the problem of the swimmer. Motivation was baffling. He could write with implacable words of historical assurance, buttressed by walls of footnotes, about people he had never known, but his grandfather was an implacable mystery. His was the problem of all historians. One might even say it was the problem of civilization.

Why did the man-who-swims-into-history swim into history? A good investigator can find economic cases, political causes, sociological causes, psychological causes. A subtle one might find metaphysical causes. After looking into mirrors for far too long, the grandson began to attribute the action to an itch. Most history has no room for itches; they are far too personal. They belong to individuals. It is best to explain the past without individuals. People are messy, quirky, ineffable. Often they are a downright nuisance, always interfering with well-laid plans and significant projects. It is better to look at history

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as the events that happen to people. This does away with bizarre quirks and itches. The past is a painting by Paolo Uccello, full of sharp spears and prancing horses, bright shields and vivid banners stiffening in an unfelt breeze. The world is frozen into moments of furious inactivity contained neatly within rectangular gilt frames. The images are strangely mute, the time and place supplied by the viewer. Everything everywhere is happening now. At once.

The man-who-swims-into-history is, let us say, from Odessa, where cream-colored warehouses and gray piers reflect sharply in the dark port waters of a darker sea. As a Russian port, it is rather new. Early in the eighteenth century, Czar Peter the Great was not content with merely being seven feet tall; he also wanted to shake Russia, if not the world. Peter had a gargantuan appetite for experience. He traveled to Holland and learned how to repair clocks. He returned to Russia and decided to build a European capital on the swampy shores of the Gulf of Finland. When he was not fighting Swedes, tinkering with clocks, or shivering in the damp and gloomy climate of his new capital, Peter dreamed of a warm-water port on the Black Sea. But that body of water was far away from Moscow and even farther from St. Petersburg. In 1884, more than one hundred fifty years after his death, it was exactly nine hundred thirty-three miles from Moscow according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. By the time of the 1911 edition it was eighty-four miles farther away.

Later in the eighteenth century, Catherine the Great was smart enough to build her palace on high, cool ground thirty miles away from Peter's capital. Between taking lovers and attending executions —sometimes of the same men—she sent Cossacks to seize all the Turkish positions along the north shore of the Black Sea. One of the key fortresses was Haji-Bey, on land that had in reverse order been ruled by Tatars, Poles, Lithuanians, Slavonians, Huns, and, in very dim and distant days, countrymen of Aristotle. For twenty-five years the troops of the Sultan, the soldiers of the Prophet with their fierce moustaches and high, soft, flowing headgear, kept their scimitars polished with the blood of northern barbarians. But shortly before Catherine succumbed, so did they. In 1794 French engineers were called in to build both a city and a port. Haji-Bey became Odessa.

When Western Europeans arrive, when engineers arrive, history becomes more complicated, less attributable to love affairs, dyspepsia and feelings of inferiority. Something as humble as a Bill of Lading becomes an important force. Few Russians in the Age of Enlightenment could read letters or numbers, and who was to protect the

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Motherland from the sharp traders of the Middle East and Europe? Czar Alexander I scouted abroad and found that Armand-Emmanuel de Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, a collateral descendant of the Great Cardinal, was unemployed. In 1803 the Duc accepted a position as Governor of Odessa. He did not have much business or governing experience, but he had lived through the Estates General, the storming of the Bastille, the fever of the Jacobins, the bad manners of the stunted corporal who so much liked to march that he had turned the whole continent into a parade ground. Richelieu, in short, knew the middle classes. As a governor of Odessa interested in commercial development, he welcomed Jews. Whatever their faults, the People of the Book were literate and energetic. They understood money. Certainly they were better than Corsicans and attorneys.

By the mid-nineteenth century Odessa was, as historians say, flourishing. It was a beautiful city, one that looked more European than Russian. That was the comment German visitors always made when they came to sit in the warm mud baths of the seashore, and Russians were inclined to believe them. Richelieu's body had departed, but since 1826 an enormous statue of the Duc had gazed from the central square down a broad flight of steps that led to the bay. So smooth, so finished, so well-proportioned were these twelve flights that a baby carriage might roll sweetly down all 240 steps without ever tilting over or tumbling a squalling inhabitant onto the pavement. More than two hundred thousand residents enjoyed the broad, tree-lined streets, leafy parks, Italian-style mansions and elegant store fronts of Odessa's central area, though a goodly number of them had to return at night to wooden hovels packed into ravines that sliced from the plateau to the sea.

Close to one-third of these residents were Jews, and in this city born of an Enlightened sovereign, they too could dress in finery and stroll slowly along Nikolai Prospekt, looking down to the huge granaries and warehouses of the waterfront and to a harbor crowded with the sails and smokestacks of foreign ships. Odessa was prosperous and well connected to the world beyond Russia's borders. It was far, far removed from any *shtetl.* Here was no surrounding population of *muhjiks*, but an international community of Greeks, Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Armenians, Italians, and even French and Germans. Odessa bore all the hallmarks of civilization—a university, an active scientific society, a public library. Is it any wonder that Jews here began to shave their beards, that some became lax about practic-

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ing ancient dietary laws, that their community newspapers appeared in both Yiddish and Russian? Is it strange that one wing of the community began to demand that Russian be substituted for Hebrew in prayer books and services? There was an unfamiliar feeling of blessing here, a hint that maybe, just maybe, the Crimea was to be the promised land.

Such ideas lasted no later than Easter, 1871. Then history returned and everyone could feel at home again. The pogrom lasted three days, not long, but long enough. There is a good joke about pogroms. It is the story about an old woman and her two granddaughters, cowering in their house as a troop of booted Cossacks smash through the door. The men thunder forward and begin to unbuckle their pants while the dutiful, well-trained granddaughters throw themselves forward and shriek in unison, "Do with us what you will, but please, please spare our *buba.*" Sternly, forcefully, the grandmother pushes them aside, begins to raise her dress and, in a heavy, lilting Yiddish accent says sharply: "Never mind, a pogrom is a pogrom!"

Of course that is for night club stages, decades, continents later. In the Odessa pogrom real people are beaten and real, breathing people cease to breathe, and property is looted from real stores and real houses go up in flames while real police yawn on nearby street corners. History, after all, is a bad hangover after a party, a very sharp headache, a taste of smoke and ashes and maybe bile, the certain knowledge of a painful day to come, a silent vow never to drink so much again. Authorities blame it all on commercial rivalry between Greek and Jewish merchants (and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* agrees). Is the community skeptical of this explanation? Evidently, for suddenly the plans to hold religious services in Russian can find no more backers.

* * *

His name was Chaim Baer and he was walking. The roads were dusty, the day hot. There were vineyards and cornfields. The towns were small, wooden, sagging, each with a church, implacable, arrogant, alien. This is what he would be leaving. He would be leaving nothing. Less than nothing. Family. Yes, family. But the family was not his, was not him. There was a tie, but there was not a tie, and there were no words to explain this. Maybe he did not belong to anyone. Maybe not even himself. The road felt good underfoot. Each

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step was taking him somewhere. Going somewhere, this is what he had wanted for a long time. Being on a road, going past blue vineyards, feeling the summer sun hot on the back of his neck, feeling the dust of travel, knowing there was somewhere else. He had a feeling that always there was somewhere else. But when he tried to explain it to friends, they could not understand. Even looking down to the harbor, the gray bulk of ships from all over the world, most people he knew turned their eyes to family, to home. They did not want to know, did not want to see where the ships came from. They did not understand his itch to move. If he did not belong here, he did not belong anywhere. He did not belong anywhere. Right now he belonged to the road, to his legs beginning to ache and his dusty shoes, to the pain in his neck from the pack slung at an angle across his shoulder, to the sagging wooden villages, crippled dogs hiding in the shade of droopy porches, blank-eyed peasants staring through him, and churches, always churches, dark and ramshackle or sunny white, straight lines soaring towards heaven, topped with a golden onion dome.

Arrogant towers, arrogant gold. And always next to graveyards where we cannot be buried. Nor they in ours, and who would want them? These churches, this soil, the dust of the graveyard, the crumbling crosses. Not ours, never could be ours. Decrees stamped by the Czar, his ministers, locked away in St. Petersburg's tomb-like vaults. And if we could make it ours, it would be no use. It would be a game, a deception. Then we would be like them. The land is not to own. It is not ours, not theirs. If anybody's, it is His. Yet He probably does not exist. Or does He look down and laugh when I think that? Let Him laugh. If He's such a big shot He'd let us know about Him, let us see sometimes. Why does He speak in books, why must we learn to read to understand His words? That's for the rabbis, smart types all their lives with eyes white on the pages of a book.

Chaim Baer put his hand to his face, touched the newly-smooth cheeks, the one tuft of hair sprouting from the chin. It is like being a boy again, a bar mitzvah boy with this smoothness. And this hair shows the joke of life. Red, a tiny red beard on the chin. Everyone will notice and comment on the contrast from my dark hair. Young ladies, won't they be interested? They'll think I am one of them, maybe, a red beard and these blue eyes. Strange eyes, my mother said, the eyes of my father. Such a strange story. In each generation, one male in the family with blue eyes. Is it a special sign? Or sometime in the past did a *muhjik* or a strange tribesman lie with a woman

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in the family? No, not a *muhjik*. A horseback warrior is better, is fine. On horse you are always going somewhere. On foot I am going somewhere, only it takes longer.

The road goes on through nights and days. Blanket roll in a cornfield, part of a moon asking questions that are not answered by the stars. Moving towards a horizon always blue. One step at a time through dust of endless afternoons. Gulp cold water at a stream, sneak from the road to pick grapes, snatch unripe corn and gobble it uncooked, raw white. At twilight, frogs sing in ditches; at night, crickets; in the pale hours before dawn, birds whose names he did not know. Sometimes the thought: this has been done before. I am doing it, me walking, but it is someone else with blue eyes and a red goatee. It is a strange feeling, standing by the side of a road in a dust cloud raised by an ox-pulled cart, choking a little, tickling in the nose, to feel it is someone else standing there, holding a finger to the nose to keep from sneezing. At night it is strange in a bedroll in a vineyard, crickets cheering a moon higher into the sky, to feel you are not alone. He knew this had been done before. He knew it would be done again. On foot, on horseback, in a train. Some other way that was no different, always the same. In each generation there was one son with blue eyes. In each generation there was one son with an itch. It had to be someone on horseback, from Asia or the lands beyond. One pair of blue eyes, one horse and one itch. That was the thought he held onto every night when the moon sang him to sleep.

* * *

It is a little noted fact of history that the rivers of Eastern Europe were jammed with swimmers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Not one grandfather but a whole generation of grandfathers sidling, walking, waddling, hurrying, moseying, lurching, striding, flinging, leaping, jumping, tiptoeing, plunging, screaming, and stretching themselves into previously empty waters. They were not yet grandfathers, but somehow the image is of aged men, dressed fully in black, *yarmulkes* affixed firmly to their scalps, long white beards floating miraculously and gently on the surface as they flash towards far-off shores. Are they not praying as they swim, *talluthes* around their shoulders, voices raised to the lord drowning the fearful beating of hearts. Remarkably, none of these grandfathers were ever known to go near the water again. None ever could teach his son, let alone grandsons, how to swim, any more than they could teach how to play baseball, steal a bagel or make love to a woman, all skills more ap-

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parently necessary in the New World than the Old. Years, decades, centuries later they were full of foolish tales, babbled in languages that grandsons neither understood nor cared much about. But each grandfather had this one moment of undisputed, noisy triumph that would quietly resonate through future generations.

* * *

There is another version of Chaim Baer's swim. Perhaps there is even another Chaim Baer. Maybe it is one of those little jokes that God or somebody using his name sometimes plays (especially, the Jewish people like to think, on them). What happens is this: in the middle of the river, Chaim Baer really takes to swimming. Suddenly, it is as if he was born to swim. His arms and legs prove incredibly powerful, his lungs are tough as leather. Romania seems too close, too easy, too dull. Instead of crossing, he turns downstream. He lets the current carry him while the feel of the water stirs some pre-Cambrian impulse in the marrow of his genes. The Pruth disappears into the broader Danube, which passes through towering, fortress-like, stony mountains, then widens into a sluggish brown delta and gently sweeps him into the waters of the Black Sea.

Now his body becomes smooth and sleek. He is a salmon, a dolphin, a streamlined sea creature born to fuck and swim. His arms —or are they fins—begin to flash, and his legs—or are they fins—kick with a steady rhythm. There is joy in the power of such movements, a surge of freedom. He turns instinctively to the right and churns in an ever-deepening wake towards the south. In the narrow Bosporus there is heavy traffic of small boats with carved prows and billowing, colored sails, and the ugly, angular shapes of gray, iron ships darkening the sea and sky. No sign of recognition touches the watery brain as he passes the crenellated, brown stone battlements of Rumeli Hisari, where Muhammed the Conqueror waited ever so patiently during the siege to free the prize of Constantinople from the Christians. There go the glorious domes of mosques on seven hills, guarded by phallic minarets, and then Topkapi on its headland, aglow in the setting sun, its block outline concealing the delicate shapes of mosaic floor and carved wall, the curved legs and breasts of several hundred women caged in the narrow quarters of the *serai.* The Sea of Marmora crackles with electricity from stars; the Dardanelles are low banks of earth where the moon vanishes into early morning sand.

In the Aegean, the waters are thick with civilization. Sun blesses

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stone palaces with bright, painted columns on the coast of Crete. At Malia a party of maidens with elaborate coiffures, tightwaisted full skirts and naked breasts dip perfect, heartbreaking white feet into warm swells. From the stony hills of Malta, Saracen knights, imprisoned in armor, banners flapping overhead, glare down at whirlpools while their impatient horses cry aloud. Vague shapes and figures of man and woman and beast swarm down from clouds, rise up from waves, move like shadows, like ghosts, like legends among the mists and antic shapes of long-sunken vessels. The swimmer is beyond myth, beyond history. Swimming is all as he shoots between the Pillars of Hercules and swings left down the Atlantic, while hurricanes create a world of tumbling mountains that shatter wooden and iron ships alike. In a flash on the left, African kingdoms, lions grazing on tropical beaches, and on the right a world of pyramids stained by science and blood, precise astronomical observatories where the learned rip hearts from living flesh to make sure the sun will rise. Then choppy straits into a vaster ocean, calm, timeless, with natives in outriggers paddling among whales, coconuts, pineapples and smiles. There are shadows with European names here, standing on islands where blank, stone faces wait forever, climbing jungle trails to the lips of smouldering volcanos, chasing elusive native girls along corridors of frangipani and orchids. Now we must imagine the swimmer sadly beginning to lose his powers, the body growing coarse, awkward, the fins atrophying, and time closing slowly as one perfect, cone-shaped mountain rises sacredly, solemnly from a calming summer sea.

* * *

There is another way to cross the Pruth, from south to north, from Romania to Russia. This has never been a popular route, but in the summer of 1915 an American journalist named John Reed did go that way. Just at sunset he stepped from a flat-bottomed boat onto Russian soil. The world glowed a magic red, and when he saw an encampment of slit-eyed, Turcoman horseback warriors, their faces warm as mahogany in the dull light of a campfire, Reed dreamed of following them into some battle five hundred years ago. He was looking for the Russian army, then scattering in a vast retreat on the Galician front. It was a task he shared with a goodly number of Russian generals, and unfortunately Reed accomplished it before they did. The result was a month spent as a prisoner in the steamy top floor of a hotel room in the ghetto section of Cholm. Reed was guarded by half a dozen Cossacks who sharpened their fingernails

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on curved swords with elaborate, jeweled handles, and displayed an immense, childish curiosity about what Americans looked like when they sat on the toilet. Later in St. Petersburg, American and Russian diplomats agreed Reed was a spy. He was given twenty-four hours to leave the country via Vladivostok by officials who were supremely unconcerned over the fact that no trains were departing for that Pacific port within the allotted time period. Their business, they patiently explained, was banishing people, not administering railroads. Reed bribed his way onto a train leaving for Romania, but a clever police agent caught him just before the border and spirited him back to the capital city. He was expelled on the next train and hustled to the Romanian border. There guards tore the lining out of his clothing, pulled the innersoles out of his shoes, and confiscated all his luggage before pushing him across the Pruth. By then Reed had seen enough forest and field, eaten enough caviar, drunk enough vodka and heard enough talk of both political and spiritual revolution to leave with the impression that Russia was the most interesting country in the world. Perhaps you have to be a graduate of Harvard to have such an opinion, or maybe it is only necessary to be an early twentieth-century artist, a devotee of Dostoevsky and Nijinsky. Neither Chaim Baer nor his grandson fit into either of those categories, so neither would ever be able to accept Reed's opinion of Russia.

Daphne Merkin

THE FEET OF A KING

Where was my father?

My imagination, usually so busy, failed me when it came to him. I invent no one in his place, no alternate father visions, the way I do for my mother. He is too distant, or she too potent, a presence;

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or, more likely than either of these, he is too potent an absence. But this is something I begin to consider only years later, when I am ready to consider so predetermined a lack of choice.

It is again Friday night, but I no longer wear my sisters Lily and Rachel's outgrown velvet jumpers. My newish breasts press against the scalloped opening of an embroidered caftan, a semi-hippie style bought in the Arab market in Jerusalem. I can no longer hear the word *bush*—Moses and the burning bush; a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush—without thinking, blushingly, of my own recently sprung undergrowth. The world has turned scratchy with sexual possibility.

"Do you think he'll last?" my father asks.

My father, who inhabits the same apartment as I do, lives worlds away during the week. It is only on Shabbos that he surfaces, at the other end of the dining room table, to discuss what I think of as Current Events with someone male and powerful.

"For a while, Walter, like any politician," the guest, Mr. Hans, replies. "You and me—we could do better with one hand tied behind our backs."

Someone has been elected to high office somewhere, in Jerusalem or Paris or London or New York—it is all the same to me. None of this cares for my feelings, least of all my father. I look into my silver soup spoon, seeking the containable, the world inside me. I shift my spoon until my father's face is reflected in its curve, distorted but nonetheless there. After years of living with him, I am still looking for my father.

My father laughs, delighted by a skepticism that matches his own. "They say he's capable. Do you believe it?"

The heavy gold watch on Mr. Hans's wrist shines below his snowy white cuff. He nods his head, as though agreeing with himself in advance. "He knows how to get his way, there's no doubt about that. The financial disclosures alone would have ruined a weaker man. For the rest, wait and see is my opinion."

"He's tough, no doubt about it," my father says, taking a heap of rice from the bowl our cook Louisa holds out to him. "And I think he knows how to handle the Americans."

"Not so much rice, Valter," my mother protests, ritually. "Louisa, don't let Mr. Lehmann have too much gravy."

I cross my ankles under the table, a grumpy fifteen-year-old. Does anyone realize I have *breasts*? Why does my father ignore all the circumstantial details that other men seem intrigued by—the

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bracelet of green, red, and blue stones that blinks, like a headlight, on the arm of Mr. Hans's wife, or the fact that I don't look exactly the same as I did only a year ago, that my body now bears visible signs of femaleness?

"The economy can't get any worse, that's for certain," Mr. Hans says. "What do you say?" He turns to my brother Eric, who is sitting on his left, as if to solicit his opinion, and then turns back to my father.

"True," my father says. "And maybe he'll get things under control."

Lily holds out her hand in front of her like the woman in the Palmolive commercial and admires my mother's diamond ring, which she is wearing.

"It looks good on me, don't you think?"

No one listens to anyone in this family. We never have.

"It's too big," I say. "Or your fingers are too short. Or fat. Something."

The diamond, round and defined, signals blue, yellow, pink, and white in the combined glow of the candles and chandelier. Mr. Hans, who sounds to me as if he is insistently repeating himself, continues to talk to my father. My father is amorphous as the world outside my head, the world Out There.

"A good man," he says of someone Mr. Hans has proposed. "But he has no clout."

Between the two of them, they will remake the affairs of a country in which neither of them live but both have a stake in, half sentimental and half paternalistic. If I were a small foreign country, a Jewish state, would my father notice my breasts?

Mrs. Hans smiles at my mother. "Everything is so delicious," she says, although I notice she has left most of the fish salad and hasn't taken second helpings of anything.

"Don't be fooled," I want to say but don't. "My mother doesn't cook. She's not my real mother."

"Thank you," my mother says.

"What was the name of the actor who played Dobie Gillis on the 'Dobie Gillis' show?" Rachel asks.

"Maynard something," my older brother Benjamin says. "I think he killed himself."

"Really?" Rachel says. "But wasn't Maynard the name of another character on the show? Maynard G. Krebs. They always included his middle initial."

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"Dwayne Hickman played Dobie Gillis," Eric says all-knowingly. "Dwayne Hickman."

"Benjamin's always making things up that he doesn't know," I say. "George Reeves is the one who killed himself."

"Everyone knows that," Benjamin says. "The guy who played Superman jumping out the window because he was afraid of heights. It's an old story, and that's not what I was talking about."

"Shut up," Eric says. "I'm trying to listen."

"Big shot," Benjamin says, snorting.

Eric flushes; "big shot" has hit the mark, reducing him to his own place on the left side of Mr. Hans, who spurns him in favor of my father.

"Pass the cookies," Lily says. "Please."

Rachel plucks a sugar cube with a pair of silver tongs from out of the bowl and puts it in her mouth, under her tongue, holding it in place until she can follow it with a bath of hot tea. I don't know where she developed this homely habit of sucking sugar while sipping tea, but whenever she does it, it is as though someone has slipped into her chair at the table. Instead of my sister—Rachel Lehmann of the glasses and brown hair—there appears in front of me the figure of an elderly Eastern European Jew. Frail and modest, he is a Jew I'm not actually acquainted with, but who is to be found in stories and novels, bent over a cup of tea at one of those large, well-lit cafeterias, Dubrow's or Famous, grasping a cube of sugar with the remnants of his teeth.

"Your children seem so marvelously close," Mrs. Hans says.

But hasn't she noticed that we are all miles apart even as we sit together at the Shabbos table? That Eric holds his tie up close and studies its pattern of polka dots as though someone has asked him for an exact count? That my youngest brother Arthur says nothing when he is here and that he disappeared from the table a while ago?

My mother smiles briefly—I think of it as her hostess smile—and says, "When they're not fighting."

"Well, they'll never be lonely," Mrs. Hans says. "So many! You must have had your hands full when they were little."

"You have children of your own?" my mother asks.

"Just two," Mrs. Hans says, as though she had secretly longed to produce a horde like my mother's. "A boy and a girl. My daughter's married."

"Oh, how nice," my mother says. "One of each."

"The lay of the land," my father is saying.

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"Quite, quite," Mr. Hans says.

What Mr. and Mrs. Hans, securely enclosed in their guestdom, don't know is everything of importance.

What I have to go on are the words my father likes, words like *tough*, *clout*, and *order*. Just to think of the word *clout* makes me laugh; it sounds so much like what it's trying to be—a fist pounding on the table, a voice hollering, "Listen here, you." Although it is clear to me even when I am very young that my father has swallowed this word, like the whale swallowed Jonah, and that it now resides inside of him, I am not sure how *clout* works. For instance, do you need only to want it to have it?

* * *

I am twelve years old, my tanned feet poking out from a brand-new pair of Nimrod sandals—no more than a few crisscrossed straps of brown leather—and my hair swept off my face with a headband. I am in the midst of imagining that I look very Israeli, that I have grown up on a kibbutz and am not afraid of anything, when my father, fueled by some mechanism that I can't see, decides not to wait on the long, straggly checkout line in the lobby of our hotel in Jerusalem.

"Wait a minute," he says to me.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be right back," he says, giving me his *Jerusalem Post* to hold. "Keep an eye out for your mother. She said she'll be down soon."

He strides forward, coming down hard on the outer side of his heels, his knees locking into the joints. He goes past groups of heavy-waisted women holding plastic flight bags that say TWA and EL AL and PERFECT TRAVEL, past silver-haired men in sunglasses wearing peaked sailor caps and bright, well-pressed clothes, as though the sandy, volatile Middle Eastern country they have come to see exists only as an image to be played with in their minds, a toy yacht.

"There's a line, sir. We're all waiting."

The woman who says this as my father walks by has a hairdo that looks as if it has been sprayed into immobility, and he heeds her reproach not at all. As I pretend to be caught up in the line of my Nimrod sandals, I take in the fact that my father is now signaling to someone behind the front desk and that the woman with the hairdo is agitating further.

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"Arnie," she says, addressing a man wearing clothes the color of a beach ball—royal blue Bermuda shorts and a red and white checked shirt—"who does that guy think he is? There's a line here. This is a democracy!"

"Take it easy, Edith. Maybe it's an emergency."

Her husband stands several yards in front of her, and he talks to her from over his shoulder, as though it were imperative that he keep watch on the view ahead.

"This is a democracy!" the woman repeats. "We're all Americans here."

Her husband turns his head, and the two of them look back toward me. I smile at them sadly, hoping they will take me for an orphan, a young but diligent visitor, a reconnoiterer of foreign opinions—a reader of *The Jerusalem Post*.

"This is Israel," her husband says. "Wait till you get home."

I wonder what is to happen when she gets home. Is she the kind of woman who thrives on creating fusses wherever she goes, in supermarkets and movie lines? Has her husband become desperately peace-loving in the face of her willingness to take up arms? And what will she do when she discovers that my father isn't an American, after all?

"Well, I still think we should say something," she says, but she sounds pacified. "Where'd Sheila say she was going?"

"There she is now," her husband says, smiling broadly at the tall girl coming toward them. "We missed you, sweetheart."

"I just went to get a Coke. Mom, please, it's fine."

Sheila, who is very tanned and looks several years older than I do, shrugs off her mother's efforts to straighten the Peter Pan collar of her short-sleeved Villager blouse. Her mother's bangle bracelets click whenever she moves her arm, and I note enviously that Sheila is wearing a pair of elegant high-heeled sandals.

"God, their Coke is so bad! I can't wait to get home and taste real food again!"

Sheila doesn't pronounce *Coke* the way I do; she hugs the *o*, making it sound almost French: *coeuq*. Her mother seems to have completely forgotten my father's undemocratic behavior in the light of her daughter's return. She stands close to her, watching with an almost fearful affection, as though at any moment Sheila might go off again in search of another substandard refreshment.

"Daddy felt the same way about the ice cream here, didn't you, Arnie?"

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"You girls," the husband says, shaking his head as though struck by his own powers of tolerance. "I can't take you anywhere."

"Don't be stupid, Daddy," Sheila says, giggling. "I *love* traveling."

I look over to the front desk, where a thickly mustached man—the same desk manager who has to be called out from some inner sanctum whenever I forget my room key—with whom my father has been in head-to-head conversation for the past ten minutes, suddenly lifts his hands, his shoulders thrust upward and elbows bent. There are dark ovals under the arms of his light blue shirt, and his gesture seems like a dramatization of defeat or frustration. But when he brings his hands back down, something has been decided, for my father pumps his hand like a victor. The deal has been decided in everyone's favor, which is conveniently his.

"Don't be stupid, Daddy, I *love* traveling." I practice saying this to myself as my father strides back toward me.

"All settled," he says.

What a wonderful purring tone it has: "Don't be stupid, Daddy. . . ." I could be—Sally Field with her smile that stretched like a rubber band, or pert-nosed Hayley Mills, a daughter in the movies or on TV.

* * *

If I had said anything along these lines to my father, he wouldn't have known what to make of it, there being no precedent for this sort of exchange between us. In later years I will connect a recurring feeling of futility in myself to the recognition, while still a little girl, that my father was not seducible—that he took me in without being in any way stirred by the proposition that I existed. The fact that he was not in love with Lily or Rachel, either, should have been a source of consolation, but it wasn't.

My father is my mother's: it is that simple. What, I wonder over the years, would it be like to have a father who is in love with *me*? Once, for his birthday, I wrote a poem, which I read aloud. "My father is the midnight owl," it began and moved on from there to talk of his love of bananas and how he rummaged for them late at night.

Everyone was gathered around the dining room table at the beach house and listened with what seemed to be an air of incredulity. Or maybe I only imagined this response, out of my own unyielding embarrassment. My father sat in one of his sultanlike paisley dress-

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ing gowns, Sulka's latest whorling-patterned silk. After I finished reading the poem, he kissed my check, thrusting his lips out as though to stamp them upon my skin, and made some mild joke. Rachel said, "How nice, Hannah," and Eric said, "I really like it. Good stuff." So why did I end up in tears? I went upstairs and lay down on my bed, face into the pillow. I didn't know why I was crying so hard. I wanted my feelings to stay far away from me, to go bother some other girl; they had no recourse in this family. If only I could have split myself in two like Patty Duke did on her show—produce an identical cousin on whom I could fob off my worse self. . . . After a while I went back downstairs, where everyone was eating birthday cake, and no one commented on my disappearance. My mother passed me a piece of cake, vanilla with chocolate frosting, on a pink paper plate, with a spoon and napkin to match. There was nothing missing that you could see.

I imagine my father saved the piece of paper on which this poem was written, the way he saved all our stuff—diplomas (Rachel's and Benjamin's outnumbering the rest of ours), citations, birthday cards (Lily's being the most painstaking, with bits of yarn and colored chalk and verses in French), a scattering of report cards. His affection displayed itself best in this sort of chronicled remove, a passion for documentation. I bet if you looked for it today, you could find it somewhere in a box or file in his office downtown, a graying piece of blue-lined notebook paper where, in the spotty ink from a Bic pen, my squat adolescent handwriting composed a blurred image of a love poem.

But when I try and think of a clearer connection between myself and my father, then and now, I come up with the name of a TV show—one that eluded my actual viewing experience but that is known to me as a concept and as a name: "The Price Is Right." My father is always talking price; even when he is talking politics, he is talking price, value for your money. He reports on everything—all he has read, seen, and heard—with a succinct detachment, as though he were addressing a shareholders' meeting: "Seven up, three down. Trade today."

How, then, can I talk to him, ask for advice on my runny problems, problems that recognize no bottom line in their vast expenditures of feeling? When I knock on his study door seeking some of the lucidity I lack and that my mother keeps assuring me he can pro-

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vide, he puts down his paper, folded into neat and very readable quadrants. Over the years I attempt these talks with my father, always at my mother's urging, about pending decisions—the decisions of a daughter. Should I go to summer camp? Should I travel to Europe on my own? And once, in my early twenties, in a never-to-be-repeated flurry—should I marry? Invariably these talks would become monologues, my father waxing enthusiastic about the logic—or illogic—of going to summer camp, traveling to Europe, getting married. His enthusiasm is founded on facts, statistics—the making and unmaking of corporations. (About my marriage prospect he peered at me and said, "Just as long as you're not marrying him for his earning power." Buy me, sell me: it would be comic if I weren't the object.) I would sit on the very edge of the couch adjacent to his easy chair, silently nodding, crawled back under cover of mute agreement into some primordial part of myself that was beyond the call of reason. When I think back on them, it seems to me that all these occasions were fraudulent from the start, insoluble—and my father believed in solutions—because they arose from a basic and fatal incapacity on my part. Behind each and every occasion that presented itself for a decision, I felt only dread, a panic about the consequentiality, the separateness, that all decision-making implied—even tiny, girlish decisions. If only I could say to my father: "I can't move. I can never go anywhere even though I look perfectly fit because I can't leave my mother, your wife."

What I would most like to know, need to know, but don't ask is this: Am *I* value for his money? I don't think so, not at all, but can he trade me in for a more cost-efficient model? He is Pharaoh, and I am Joseph; the best I can do is to be of use, indispensable, point out that a famine is on the way and he would do well to set in supplies. My father likes people—children—who can be relied on to get things done. So it is that one winter, about the middle of January, he hits upon the perfect approximation, his form of affection.

It is the same winter I witness my cousin Beatrice screaming at the foot of the stairs and begin to have insomnia, a precursor of the pitfalls of adulthood. Come twelve, one o'clock in the morning, I can't fall asleep. Everything is keeping me awake: the library books, already overdue, I must remember to return; our nurse Lena, whom I'm afraid of; Naomi Litt, whom I want to like me but who only does so when she isn't "against" me; my mother, whom I'm afraid of; my arms, which aren't entirely smooth-skinned the way Rachel's are but

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are covered with a sprinkling of light brown hair, which may any day get worse and render me a full-scale freak, just like the Monkey Girl I have seen a photograph of in Benjamin's book of freaks (his favorite book after *The FBI Story*); my father, whom I'm afraid of; Lily, who is always watching me and who I wish would die instantly, clearing me from the necessity of submitting to her unfriendly, ready-to-be-jealous gaze; the geography test that I haven't studied enough for and even if I did, it wouldn't help because I still have no idea where the different states go. (No matter how many times I study the filled-in map, all visual grasp flees my mind the minute I am confronted by the blank outline in Mrs. Gordon's class with the instructions: *Fill in the fifty states.* What am I to do with Oregon and Utah and Wyoming, reduced to one unlocatable jumble, but assign them hapazard places—tucking them in around other states whose neighbors I can't remember, Florida and Louisiana?) There is every reason in the world—in my world—to be awake at midnight, but most of all there is the dull clang of my self-dislike, striking the hour of awful truth like the most discordant of clocks: Hannah Lehmann, I am as I am, wrong. If I were right, it wouldn't be possible to feel such aversion to my own skin; I would have a mother other than mine, a mother who wouldn't say, unnaturally, "Your tears don't move me," when I cry. How can I feel right unless she is all wrong, and how can she be all wrong when I long for her, loathe and desire her, and don't think I will ever cease longing?

How did my father, having no direct link with me, decipher that now was the time to prove my case, that his youngest daughter—me, Hannah—was in some slow-dawning but nonetheless genuine fashion, imperiled? Did my mother, who was the usual conduit of news about "the children," good or bad, relay the symptoms of trouble? And whose idea was it to have my father, for a period of a few months, pay me a quarter every weekday evening to hang up his coat on one of the thick wooden hangers with the three initials—WLM—ornately engraved in the center? Whosever idea, it was an inspired one: I loved my stint as my father's personal hat-check girl, greeting him at the front door and then helping him off with his heavy, single-breasted black wool overcoat. There was also a double-breasted taupe coat of cashmere, and an English raincoat. To be paid for taking my father's coat from him as he shrugged it off and for then walking several feet to hang it up in the small downstairs

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closet was, most clearly, to be paid for doing nothing at all—for being me. Someone—a psychiatrist my mother consulted?—must have suggested that what I needed was to feel singled out, special, loved. Although this undoubtedly was what Lily, Rachel, Benjamin, Eric, and Arthur needed, too, it was I who had begun to exhibit certain bothersome clues to a state of inner distress, small resistances in my natural functioning.

Interestingly enough, it wasn't Lily—whom I would have expected to complain about my special treatment—but Eric who was most resentful. "But she's not *doing* anything!" I could hear him say to my mother somewhere in the house when my father's key turned in the lock. "I could do the same thing even better!"

There wasn't much my mother could argue back under the circumstances, but once in a while I would hear her reply soothingly, "It's a girl's job," as though *that* had anything to do with anything.

I'm not sure why this odd ritual came to an end, but I think Eric's protests helped hasten its demise; it had been created to make me feel less overlooked, not to point up another child's similar sense of bereavement. While it lasted, though, I felt assuaged by the pretense that I worked, of an evening, at the "21" Club and that my father was a passing gentleman whose tip came about logically, as my due. Buy me, sell me—why, it made sense! The whole exchange took a matter of seconds, but it felt wonderfully clear-cut, without the web of emotion I generally spun around both my parents—that hopelessly entangling skein of anger and need and pain.

I had heard about the "21" Club to begin with from my father. His on-the-town anecdotes were one of the things I liked about him, the snatches of songs he remembered from what I took to be his *bon vivant* days at "21," the Stork Club, and the Latin Quarter. "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long" was his favorite tune; he would break into it when he was in an especially relaxed mood—on a Friday night without any guests—sing a raucous line or two, and then fade out. "That's all I remember," he would say, smiling broadly while looking around the table, as though he had just belted out a show-stopping number and was now expecting a storm of applause. "What can you do?" he say. "My memory's not so good anymore. I work too hard supporting all you kids." And then he'd try it once again, braying the music, hamming up the chorus, his voice strong but not particularly lilting. There were other songs he liked—"Get Me to the Church on Time," which he tried to do like Stanley Hollo-

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way, and "Two Ladies in the Shade of the Banana Tree," which he claimed had been made popular by a twin-sister singing team with a German-sounding name, whom none of us had ever heard of.

Once, to my amazement, as if to throw out a rope from my father's raft of memories to mine, these mythical sisters actually showed up on "The Ed Sullivan Show" while I sat watching it with Rachel and Eric. This was the only TV program we were allowed to watch regularly in those years, a fitting finish to the specialness that was Sunday. Eric loved the little talking mouse, Topo Gigio; it was what he watched the show for. Topo Gigio had only to pronounce Ed Sullivan's name, "Ed-tie, pu-leez, Ed-tie," to send Eric into howls of delight. Rachel and I watched all the acts with equal and indiscriminate passion, from juggles to ventriloquists to torch singers like Nancy Wilson. Lily disdained the show altogether, and the only times Benjamin sat through the whole thing was when Ed Sullivan announced that one of his stable of wisecracking comedians would be on, Alan King or Rodney Dangerfield or George Carlin. That evening it was just the three of us, Rachel, Eric, and me (Arthur was too young to stay up during most of the Ed Sullivan period), when suddenly there they were: blonde and buxom and very guttural, the pair swayed their ample hips in unison as they harmonized the refrain of "Two Ladies in the Shade of the Banana Tree."

I was so excited to see them in living flesh that I went around singing their hit to myself for weeks afterward, stringing out the syllables in "ban-nah-nah tree" just as they had. I think I even convinced myself for a while that these sisters had been my father's girlfriends before he met my mother—part of a distant bachelor past in which he went incessantly to nightclubs, a white silk scarf dangling from under his coat collar. In actuality, although my father married late and was by far the oldest father among the fathers I knew—grandfatherly age, in fact—he was never quite the apogee of rakishness I would have liked to believe him to have been. The female whom he escorted most often to the clubs (pocketing matchbooks from each, just as he always snitched hand towels from the foreign hotels he stayed in) was undoubtedly my mother, during the two years of their on-again, off-again courtship. But the reality of who my father was—or had once been—didn't much matter at these moments when he was at his ease, taking jolly part in a culture that was recognizable to me rather than recounting with great sentiment some aspect of his youth in Germany that sounded alien and intrinsically unappealing. I came closest to loving my father when he sat

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in his white Shabbos shirt with one button opened at the neck, tieless, singing bits and pieces of American tunes. I could almost see him then as a harmless progenitor, safely consigned to caricature, a slightly tipsy but amiable fellow: Eliza Doolittle's father as played by Stanley Holloway in *My Fair Lady*.

What strikes me as odd in retrospect is not that there were things I liked about my father—the sandy feel of his cheeks after Shabbos, for instance, when he hadn't been able to shave for a day—but that they were highlighted so inordinately. Sitting on his lap, in my velvet jumper, I delighted in running my fingers across the grain of his grown-in bristles, his skin the texture of an emery board. When I am older and no longer invited to sit on his lap or so readily intrigued by analogous incidentals—something that looks or feels like something else, like Eric's velvet skating jacket reminding me of artichokes—there are even fewer means of contact. Throughout the years of my adolescence, I recall my father taking note of me only when I get a haircut, as though each successive one were further demonstration of the erratic nature he suspects me of harboring—the demons of Beatrice come to haunt the next generation. "I see you've cut your hair again," he says on a Tuesday night somewhere in my past. It is winter, the window sills are bejeweled with snow. We have bumped into each other in the kitchen: my father is scavenging for a banana and I am looking for a snack, a reprieve from my schoolwork. His tone is subtly preening, as though he prides himself on his unlikely but keen visual sense: he is a man who notices haircuts.

"Yes," I say. "Do you think it looks better than before?"

I am always trying to improve on "before"; before is never good enough. There is magic in "after," the same magic that will draw me in later years to lovers who don't like me as I am, who see in me a redoubtable object. In the land of "after," I will be unconditionally loved; I have only to find the entry to it, the inspiring aureole.

"I don't know," my father says. "I liked it longer. You look different."

"Really?" I say. "Don't you think I look better?"

My father unpeels a banana, dividing and conquering the yellow skin around the white fruit. I wonder for a moment how he would fare in a blizzard, bereft of warm clothes—I have just been lying upstairs on my bed, reading the second half of *King Lear* for an advanced English class the next day. Exposed to the elements, with Eric as his faithful Fool, would my father finally recognize he has

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misjudged me—his youngest daughter, pure as I am honest, his Cordelia?

"Maybe," he says, not unkindly. "Could be I'm just not used to it."

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of us all? It is not Lily or Rachel I'm competing with so much as myself—a reflection that will do me justice.

"See you," I say.

These discussions with my father about my appearance, minute as they are, make me feel shy—as if I had been picked out, flooded with light.

"Hair grows," he says.

"Yeah," I say, although I have just had mine cut expressly to counteract this tendency. I am holding a glass of juice and a rocky piece of streusel cake—the buttery crumbs of its topping now gone hard as pellets—to take upstairs with me.

"Your mother starves me," my father says, eyeing my cake.

"You don't look starved," I say.

He pulls his chest up with feigned dignity and says, "Appearances are deceiving."

"Poor man," I say, giggling. My father's abiding appetite is a family joke.

"Good night," he says, shaking his head and shuffling off to his study in his slippers; his feet under his Sulka pajamas are dimpled and white, the feet of a king.

The haircut my father was having difficulty adjusting to was very short, nearly androgynous. What I've looked for in hairdressers, from the age of fifteen up, has nothing to do with their skill at improving my looks. It has to do with a quality of attentiveness, an obsession with an abstract ideal of beauty—the beauty that will insure my father's undying devotion—equal to my own. The hairdressers I go to more than once are invariably fastidious and acutely homosexual. They know nothing of my quest; they know only of my hair and what they wish to do with it, a reflection of their whimsy rather than my need. I'm not even sure some of them—those with distant fathers of their own—might not have been sympathetic to my wish had I bothered to explain it. What I desired was a haircut—like the perfectly fitting glass slipper in the Cinderella story—that would transport me from my grungy state into a condition of chosenness: I am the belle of the ball, the one who wins the hand of the father-prince.

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Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

All hospitals, she had thought, were alike; but in some respects this was not so. In this hospital, the one in which he lay dying, the wall behind her father's head was bright orange. This wall he could not see, tied, as he was, to his bed—to what remained of his life—by bottles and tubes that were indeed like all the other bottles and tubes that had bound him precariously to his life in all the other hospitals. The door to his room was bright yellow.

The nursery-room colors reminded Clara of a playground she had seen somewhere in the South long ago: orange slides and yellow swings and green monkey bars next to an old church in the middle of a graveyard. Clara had cherished that image of life in the midst of death, children sailing high above the tombstones on their yellow swings into the clean blue sky; what could be, if you thought about it, more natural? Of course the smell in this room was awful, hothouse flowers and something else—something swampy, rancid. The playground must have been connected to a school, she thought idly, a church school. And the kneebone is connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone. . . . What nonsense one thought in the presence of the dying. Silly rhymes kept coming into her head. In this room they talked neither of life nor of death. They hardly talked at all. Occasionally someone murmured, "It's a sin"; voices murmured in assent: "It's a sin."

The old man, who was stubborn, had not allowed the nurses to remove his contact lenses—what a fuss there had been when Clara's mother found out—and now there was a milky film over his eyes. Under the film, his caged pupils burned bright with fever. When Clara's son was in the hospital after his skiing accident, wrapped like a mummy in a body cast, he'd had to wear a loin cloth. But he always managed to take it off. One day she'd come in to find him crying; his loin cloth was on. "The nurse said, 'Where's your modesty?' the child said, "so I have to wear my modesty now." Old enough to have a skiing accident and not old enough to know the word *modesty*, imagine. One is never old enough, Clara thought, and then she thought, old enough for what?

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From the window next to the old man's bed there was a view of tenements and backyards, laundry flapping in the wind. Black smoke billowed in the far distance. Clara saw fire engines tiny as a child's toys. Where are the flames? Clara wondered. "Where there's smoke, there's fire," she said out loud. "Now, now," the nurse—who was removing the old man's contact lenses with a tiny rubber suction cup—said. The old man was wearing a light-blue hospital gown; paper slippers were placed neatly at the foot of his bed. Like that painting of Saint Ursula in Venice: slippers near her bed while the angel trumpets and she sleeps, the slippers so obdurately themselves. The physical world doesn't change at all, how odd, Clara thought. Nothing shares our grief.

Clara and her brother held hands. "Are you frightened, Daddy?" Clara said. "What a question," her mother said. The old man raised his left arm and made a clenched fist. They all looked to see for whom the salute was intended, all but Clara's brother, who said, "It's all right, Old Man, your heart's okay," which was not true. Clara felt an accustomed jealousy; how like her brother to understand their father so well, how unfair. How kind. In a spasm of attention, the old man sought his grandson's eyes: "Doing your homework?" he said. "Yes, Grandpa," Clara's son said. The boy's left leg was shorter because of the skiing accident; only Clara ever seemed to notice. "Good," the old man said, after which he subsided into random tremors and said no more. His daughter-in-law rearranged the flowers in the vases. Clara's daughter cradled and kissed the old man's forehead, crooning, "Grandpa." "Now wash your hands," her grandmother said. Clara always called her father *Daddy*; she called her mother *Mother*, although she'd always wanted Clara to call her Sadie. "No, Nana," the child replied, "I won't."

"I want to talk about money," Sadie said. "Not in the room with Daddy," Clara said. "Not now, Ma," her brother said. "You're a good girl," the old man said; it was not clear for whom his words were intended.

Riding home in the car they passed Sunset Park. "Remember when we used to swim here?" Clara said. "Yeah," her brother said; "you were always scared some jiggerboo would drown you."

"My friend Marie got raped here last year," Clara said; "She was on her way to the daycare center."

"Don't talk about things like that," Sadie said. "I'm sensitive. It hurts me."

"It hurt Marie a lot more," Clara said.

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"I wouldn't worry, Ma," Clara's brother said. "She probably asked for it." His shoulders were trembling with suppressed laughter. In the back seat Clara and her sister-in-law squeezed each other's hands to keep from laughing out loud.

They stopped at a red light. "Why are we parking?" Sadie said. Clara and her sister-in-law snorted with laughter, gagged on it. The grandchildren stared straight ahead.

"The Old Man's threatening to walk."

"Walk? He's got 104 fever."

"Yeah. He pulled a tube out of his arm. He said it hurt. He said they were trying to kill him."

"*The fever must be down.*"

"He wouldn't make it to the door. Ma made me take his clothes away so he couldn't walk."

The last time he'd been in the hospital, the old man had walked out, an overcoat over his striped pajamas, and hitchhiked home. "We want to do an exploratory operation," the doctors had said. "You're not Columbus and I'm not a continent, and nobody's doing any exploring around here," the old man said; then he walked.

"Is Grandpa really dying this time?"

"He's threatening to walk."

"What will Nana say?"

"Probably what she said last time he walked—'What are you doing in my kitchen? You're killing me.'"

"That's what she said?"

"That's what she said."

"She's a jerk."

Oh God let him walk, Clara prayed. She felt as if there were deep fissures running through her body. ("*Fishes?*" her psychiatrist asked.) But when her brother called, she said, "It's really bad this time. He's got to stay."

"Yeah. You gotta admire him. He's making Ma sick. He won't listen to what's good for him."

Oh good, Clara thought, remembering her father's raised arm, his clenched fist; *good.*

The fever left, no one knew why. No one knew why it had come. The next time the family went to see him, he was sitting up in

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bed, complaining about the food. "Why didn't you come to see me?" he said, fixing his clouded eyes on Clara and her daughter.

"Oh, Daddy, we did."

"We did, Grandpa."

"*You* did," he said to his son. "You're a good boy," he said to his grandson.

His granddaughter turned her face away and cried. His grandson cried too. The Christmas he gave me fifty dollars he gave my brother an Edsel, Clara thought; never mind.

"I never had a heart attack," the old man said.

"That's right, dear," Sadie said.

"How come I saw that machine with all the blips on it, Daddy?" Clara said. When he was hooked to that machine he had called her an angel of light. "Send the angel of darkness away," he'd said. ("Why do you think the angel of darkness was your mother?" Clara's psychiatrist asked. "It's not what I think, it's what he thinks." "He might have meant the angel of death?" "No.")

"I never had a heart attack. They have doctors back there twisting dials behind the machine. Like a television set."

"So what did you have, Daddy?"

"Gas." He never remembered seeing Clara in the hospital.

"When am I going home?"

"Soon, Old Man," his son said.

"Be good, dear," his wife said.

"We love you, Grandpa," his granddaughter said.

"The food stinks."

The next time Clara called him at the hospital, the old man spoke to her in Italian, which she only dimly understood. He spoke in a guttural whisper: "They want to kill me."

"Can't you tell me in English, Daddy?"

"They don't want me to leave here," he said. "They're listening."

"They can't want to kill you if they want to keep you there forever, Daddy," Clara said. But he had hung up.

"Pull the drapes," the old man said. He meant the hospital curtains. "They're doing terrible things in here," he said. "That guy there. Terrible." He nodded weakly in the direction of the man who shared his room, rubbing his throat to his chin with his index finger,

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a gesture that meant: *Words can't say. . . . If words could say. . . . Ooooh. . . .* The man in the next bed was dying of cancer; no one ever came to see him. "Animals," the old man said. Clara's brother looked puzzled; for once Clara understood first: Sex. He meant they were doing sex. "I see it," he said. "I know. They take him down for x-rays and he doesn't come back. I know. Nuns. They think I don't know. Creeping around all night long." It was a Methodist hospital; there were no nuns.

"Daddy's talking about sex," Clara said.

"You know you got a dirty mind?" her brother said.

What if my brother should die? Clara thought. Drunk, she saw her brother's car in flames, his charred body. She allowed her son to comfort her: "Grandpa will be all right, Ma." *Poor little boy.* She meant her son. She meant her brother. Her son, weeping, held her as she wept. *Daddy*, she said, *Daddy*, deceiving her son, who loved her. *My brother*, she thought; *my brother.* She saw her brother in an airplane, spiralling down into oily waters. She closed her eyes against the sound of the crash.

The man in the next bed died. Clara's mother, alert with greed, asked the Philippino nurse to tell her all about it. "Can it, Ma," Clara's brother said. *Well, what do you know?* Clara thought; *he told Sadie to can it.* "I'm only trying to express an interest," Sadie said. *Like unto Job's comforters*, Clara thought; *my mother's getting fat.* She giggled. "Can it, Clara," her brother said.

"Terrible things, terrible things," the old man said.

"The man who was doing terrible things isn't here any more, daddy. There's somebody else here now." The old man shouted a curse in Italian; who would have thought he could summon up such strength?

"Get the nurse," Sadie said.

"What for, Mother?"

Sadie bit her hand. "This is killing me," she said, her hand muffling her words.

"You're killing your mother," Clara's brother said.

"Who, me? What did I do?" *I never do nothing and I never do much*, Clara thought.

"You talk too much," her brother said.

The old man was asleep now, his toothless mouth open. Clara thought she could smell his breath across the room.

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After they dropped Sadie home, Clara and her brother went to a bar.

"Remember that Edsel the Old Man bought me?"

"I remember."

"I paid him back. A hundred a month."

"I never knew that."

"Now you know."

"I talk too much," Clara said.

"Yeah. But you got the charm in this family."

"I do?"

"Yeah."

"Do me a favor? Take my side more often."

"Hey. There aren't any sides. We're all on the same side."

That's his charm, Clara thought; he believes it.

The old man hadn't spoken to his sister for years. Not since their mother—Clara's grandmother—had died. Really such a silly will to quarrel over—a couple of acres on a highway and a ramshackle summer cottage was all she'd left. And after all, the old man's sister deserved it: she'd nursed the mean-tempered woman all through her final illness; she'd never married. But the old man was unable to forget that he'd pruned the pear trees that were the only glory of the summer place; he felt entitled. The business stuck in his craw: "What does an old maid want with pear trees?" he asked, a constant refrain. It had become a joke between Clara and her brother: "What does an old maid want with pear trees?" they chanted whenever events confounded them, whenever they met after long separations; when Clara married, her brother startled the priest by saying, "What does an old maid want with pear trees?" Once when they were playing poker, Clara's brother said "What does an old maid want with pear trees?" just before the last raise, and Clara laughed so hard she wet her pants, and lost the hand even though she had aces over kings.

Now the old man was calling his sister every day. Sadie suspected Clara of having given him her phone number to foment trouble—Sadie saw any possible reconciliation as trouble, it hurt her, she was sensitive—but the fact was that the old man had, over all the intervening years, remembered. He talked to his sister in Italian: "They're trying to kill me. Get me out. They do terrible things." So now Sadie and the old man's sister called each other every day, Sadie tearfully pleading that the doctors knew best; she

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couldn't handle him at home, it was killing her, the old man's sister snapping that *she* had taken care of *her* mother, a wife was *supposed* to take care of her husband, that was what marriage was *about*, "after *all.*"

"I want Daddy out," Clara said.

"It's killing Ma," Clara's brother said.

"Why can't he die at home?"

"Are you gonna change his diapers? Ma can't."

"I'll hire a nurse."

"I love you, Clara, you're my sister, but you never knew anything about money."

"I don't think money is what this fight is about. What does a nurse cost?"

"Hey. What fight? We're not fighting. The old man's sister knows how to give orders, but I don't see her coming to the hospital."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Hey, come on, your kids are getting upset."

"Why shouldn't they get upset? Somebody's dying."

"You gotta say dying in front of the kids?"

"They know life's not a candy store."

"Yeah. They live with you."

"Don't disturb the doctor," Sadie said; "don't call him up."

"Why not?" Clara said.

"He's a kind man," Sadie said.

"I notice he doesn't answer my phone calls."

"He's busy, dear."

"Do you understand that Daddy's dying?"

"Don't say *dying*," Sadie wailed, amazing how she could wail and whine at the same time; Clara felt a shudder that seemed to come straight from the bowels of her childhood.

"Are you going to take care of him?" Sadie said. "I'm an old woman."

Clara stiffened her heart against her mother's tears; she looked up *rubber hygienic goods* and *practical nurses* in the Yellow Pages. It was a wife's business to take care of her husband. After *all.* Clara told herself she shrunk from that intimate contact—how could she, his daughter, change her father's diapers? Or is it really the smell I'm afraid of? she wondered; it is the smell. His flesh, slippery now, against the bones, was still sweet to her; but she couldn't bear the

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smell. Like rotting orchids, bat dung. Were poisonous gases escaping through all those bottles and tubes?

"Jesus, the smell," Clara's brother said, and hugged her.

"Does it bother you too?"

"Jesus," he said, and kissed her.

The old man was leaning against the yellow door; he was wearing blue paper slippers. "We're taking you home, Daddy," Clara said.

"Possibly," the old man said.

"Not 'possibly,' *really*. Don't you believe me?"

"Possibly," the old man said; "could be."

But when Clara's brother walked in, he said, "Good boy, good boy," and grinned. He had shrunk so much they had to tie his belt around his pants with a double knot to keep them up.

When they rolled him past the nurses' station in the wheelchair, he waved—"Hey, Old Man, you look like the Pope blessing the crowds," Clara's brother said. He waved and he sang out, pleasantly as spring, "Fuck you, fuck you." "You gotta hand it to the old guy," Clara's brother said. Clara's hand rested on her brother's as he wheeled the old man to the elevator. A woman shuffled toward them. Her hair was hennaed bright red, there was a bald spot the size of a quarter on the top of her head. She wore a shiny pink nylon robe, a red nylon feather boa, and blue paper slippers. She bent over to whisper something in the old man's ear. Clara could have sworn she bit it. The old man grinned and patted the woman's thigh. In the elevator, Clara's brother said, "I got my own ideas about who's been doing terrible things in this hospital." "Just what I was thinking," Clara said. They laughed so hard the old man bounced in his wheelchair. "Nice to see you children happy," he said. They laughed harder. "What does an old maid want with a pear tree?" Clara's brother said.

Riding in the car, Clara felt as if she were going on a picnic. The old man's head, on its stalk of a neck, made quick, birdlike movements, side to side, taking the world in like a child. He slept for a while.

Then: "Pop's dead," he said.

"Yeah, Old Man."

"It's a sin."

"Yeah, it's a sin."

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"When did Mama die?"

"Grandma died twenty years ago, daddy."

"It's a sin." The old man was crying, and singing:

Oh Hel—
Oh Hel—
Oh Helen please be mine
Your count—
Your count—
Your country is divine
For cu—
For cu—
For curiosity
Oh Hel—
Oh Hel—
Oh Helen please love me.

"Clara?"

"Im sitting right behind you, Daddy."

"Be sure to sing that one to the kids, Old Man," Clara's brother said.

"It'll kill Ma," Clara said. Her brother caught her eye in the rearview mirror and winked.

Sadie didn't want to rent a hospital bed: "What for?" she said. "It's just a matter of time," Clara's brother said. Sadie didn't want to hire a practical nurse: "I can't afford it," she said. "But if it's just a matter of time?" Clara said. "Don't say *dying*," Sadie said to Clara, who hadn't said dying. Clara's sister-in-law rattled the dishes in the sink: "Shit!" she said. Clara exchanged looks with her daughter, who rolled her eyes. Clara's son sat in the small room off the kitchen, holding the old man's hand.

Sadie's Barcalounger stood in the doorway to the old man's room, which was really the second parlor. He lay on a foam-rubber couch that had doubled for a bed—such a narrow bed—ever since Clara could remember. The couch and the bolsters were covered in slipcovers that Clara coveted—cerise cabbage roses against pale gray and lime stripes, deco delight. In the first parlor, the one in which no one ever sat, the sofas were red velvet covered with heavy perforated plastic; the wood was white, trimmed with gold. The couch-bed in the second parlor was covered with heavy plastic too. And now with a rubber sheet. Where are all the doilies Sadie crocheted when we were young? Clara wondered. That morning, be-

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fore her brother and his wife arrived, while Sadie napped, she had gone through all of Sadie's kitchen cabinets, removing all the 1940s glasses, which she put in a large shopping bag. Also a Depression-glass sugar pitcher and creamer. "Mommy, what are you doing?" her daughter asked; the child had sounded frightened. "Sadie will never miss them," Clara said; "We'll buy her new ones." Clara's son said, "Mommy, don't." But Clara plundered nonetheless.

The Barcalounger was covered with shiny green slipcovers. "You wouldn't think you could get slipcovers for a Barcalounger," Clara said; "Wouldn't you think they'd interfere with the machinery? Trust my mother." Clara's son poured her a drink. "What I really want is a cigarette," she said. Sadie—who could sleep through earthquakes, but who'd always heard the key turn in the lock when Clara came home from dates, to this house, years ago—called from the bedroom: "No cigarettes! That's what's killing your father!" "Don't say *killing*," Clara said.

Now Clara said, "Why don't you put the Barcalounger in the room with daddy, next to his bed? He likes somebody to hold his hand." "*You* hold his hand," Sadie said; "I can't stand his moaning. I'm too compassionate, it hurts me."

"Ma can't sleep," Clara's brother said.

"It's only a matter of time," Clara said, while her sister-in-law banged the pots in the sink, and her daughter said, "Oh Mommy!"

"Hey!" her brother said.

Clara wondered how she was going to get the shopping bag with the Depression glass and the deco juice glasses out of the house.

The stench in the old man's room overwhelmed all of Clara's sympathy, all of Clara's love. She could think of nothing else. She could not remember what the old man had looked like before he looked like this—shrunken, bent, fierce, skin like crinkled crepe. His breathing was shallow and fast. Once in a while he spoke: "Give me a cigarette," he said. "No, Daddy," Clara said; she was afraid of Sadie, who had found three cigarettes in his pajama top. The cigarettes had come from Clara's son, who was not afraid of Sadie, and who did not mind the smell.

"Who are all these men?" the old man said, his fire-bright eyes scanning the dark, empty room.

"There's no one here, Daddy, just shadows," Clara said.

"Who are all these men?" he said.

"Shhh. It's okay."

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The old man began to cry.

From the kitchen, Sadie said: "He imagines things all the time. He thinks there are men in there. Tell him they're shadows."

"Do the men bother you, Daddy? Do you want me to tell them to go away?" Clara said.

"No."

"Are they kind?"

"They're good guys."

"Good."

"It's that other guy I can't stand. The one that was with me when I was born, the one that looks like me. The one who does terrible things. Always did terrible things."

"Oh, Daddy," Clara said. "I don't think he ever meant to do terrible things. I don't think he's bad. I know he's not bad." She held her father's hand. She knelt at his bed and pressed her cheek against his, happy, absolving.

"*You don't know shit!*" the old man yelled. "Give me a cigarette," he whispered.

Clara thought: God, the smell.

"Don't trust that Clara," the old man said, "she's not so nice."

"It's me, Daddy, Clara, I'm here."

"Oh."

Clara, who was drunk, told her daughter: "Grandpa said he couldn't trust me."

"He meant because you wouldn't give him a cigarette."

"That's not what he meant. My brother wouldn't give him a cigarette either."

"You know Grandpa loves you, Mommy."

But that was exactly what Clara didn't know. She arranged all the proofs in her mind, she remembered endearments, reconciliations. But she could not connect the proofs, the endearments, the reconciliations, with the man who lay burning, dying. Perhaps the fever has burned away all that is false in him, she thought; in which case, he does not love me.

She drank.

The old man's father had died whistling a bird-call. The old man's mother had died with the words *veal cutlets* on her lips. What do these things mean. If only she could remember what he'd looked like before he'd become this thing. Clara no longer knew for whom she cried. She dreaded her visits to the airless, phantomed room.

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Maybe there's a point to Sadie after all, she thought, and then she wrenched her sympathy away from her mother. But she could not find the father she loved, even in her dreams. Orphaned, she wept.

One day Clara arrived to find her father sitting at the kitchen table. He was slurping lentil soup while Sadie hovered with a dish cloth, a napkin. He asked for peppers and eggs, most of which he ate. "I got a joke for you," he said to Clara: "A very religious man was sitting in the park. A pretty woman walked by with a baby. The baby was doing terrible things. It was ugly. So the man said, ''Scuse me, lady, but how come such a pretty woman like you has such an ugly baby? Who was the father?' So the woman said, 'Well, there was no father. I had artificial insemination.' So the man said, 'That's what the Bible means when it says spare the rod and spoil the child.' Get it? Spare the rod and spoil the child?"

"I love you, Daddy," Clara said.

"Sure you do," he said, "we know that. Tell her to go away." He meant Sadie.

Sadie took a cuticle scissors from the pocket of her housedress, dipped a dish cloth in a glass of water, snipped off two edges of the cloth, and stuffed them in her ears: "I can't stand the moaning," she said.

"Who's moaning?" the old man said. Clara mopped his face, his chest. "No more talk about dying around here," he said. "She says she's here all the time, but she goes away." He meant Sadie. "I'm here, Daddy," Clara said. "Of course," he said. When he rose to go to the bathroom, Sadie jumped up to help him. "You tell her, Clara," he said, "tell her I can do it alone. You know I can do it. You know I'm good."

"He'll fall and kill himself," Sadie wailed. She seemed to be hearing all right, in spite of her earplugs. Clara thought he might very well fall and kill himself; she willed him across the room. "Shut up," she said to Sadie, who shrieked: "You're killing me!" He made it to the bathroom, and then to bed. "I feel good," he said. "Do you love me, Daddy?" He patted Clara's hand. He fell asleep. Sadie went into her bedroom and turned the television on, "The Price Is Right." Clara could hear her crying. She sat at the kitchen table and lit a cigarette. She finished her father's peppers and eggs.

The next day Clara's brother phoned: "He's gone."

"Gone where?"

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"Gone."

"Where are you?"

"I'm at Ma's house."

"Gone where?"

Clara's sister-in-law got on the phone: "Cla? He passed away an hour ago."

The terrible thing has happened.

Clara woke her children up. "Never," she said; "Never never never." What had she ever understood. "Never." Her son held her. Her daughter kissed her. She felt—she dressed—like a widow in her grief. She arrived too late to see her father's body taken away. "What were his last words?" Clara said. But Sadie had been on the phone when the old man died.

She stretched her body on the old man's bed, rested her face on his pillow. She pressed her flesh hard against the narrow bed. The windows were open and the summer cries of children filled the air: *Hide and Seek!*

Kneeling, she made the sign of the Cross. She remembered only her father's outstretched hand, she could not summon up an image of his face. When she was young—she had not thought of this for years—she had seen graffitti on the posters of their subway stop, words she was supposed not to know; she'd thought she recognized her father's spiky handwriting. *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.* Are the stories of our lives the real stories of our lives or are they stories about stories? She remembered his spiky handwriting, but she could not remember his face. She said The Lord's Prayer, stumbling over the word trespasses; *sin* came to her lips, it always had, more easily than trespasses.

In the kitchen they were having coffee, Sadie was in her Barcalounger: "Kiss me," she said. Clara lit a cigarette, observed the dandruff on the undertaker's jacket. She felt as if she had been carried a long distance—this was her own voice, sighing—to a place of no rest. She felt the future enter into her, darkly: "Kiss me," Sadie said.

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Anita Susan Grossman

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMOS OZ

ASG: Was there anything about American life that especially surprised or startled you? I know that you've been here before, but this is the first time you've actually lived here for a period of time.
AO: I don't know. I'll have to take everything with me back to my darkroom in Kibbutz Hulda and work on it before I can sort out my American impressions. I am not very quick at that. If I had been quick, I would have been a journalist, I guess.
ASG: Do you see yourself as writing essentially for an Israeli readership?
AO: Always. Hebrew is my musical instrument, and Israelis are my immediate audience. As a matter of rule, I always publish in Hebrew first.
ASG: What Hebrew writers most influenced you?
AO: I regard [Micha Josef] Berdyczewski, [Joseph Hayyim] Brenner, [Shmuel Yosef] Agnon as my literary mentors, but often I read about myself in reviews and criticisms in America and Germany that I am some sort of illegitimate Israeli offspring of this or that great Russian or French writer. In fact, my genuine literary parents and mentors are virtually unknown to my readers outside Israel, which is a source of frustration to me.
ASG: To ask an autobiographical question, the collection of your two novellas entitled *Unto Death* was dedicated to the memory of your father, Yehuda Arieh Klausner. Is there any particular reason for the dedication of that book to him?
AO: That's the one I published close to his death, and he was very fond of at least one of the two stories in the book, "Crusade." That's the only piece of my writing of which he had wholeheartedly approved. I thought that it would be only right to dedicate this one to his memory.
ASG: Did he follow your career and read your work?
AO: Yes, very intensively.
ASG: Was he proud of your writing?
AO: I guess in the end he was, even though he didn't approve of my joining a kibbutz in my teens. In the end he accepted the idea.
ASG: People tend to make peace with their parents after a while.
AO: When you have your first child, you begin to understand what

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your parents were all about. You turn your head backwards and suddenly see yourself behind your own shoulder.

ASG: What was your father's field of scholarship?

AO: He wrote a number of scholarly books on comparative literature. He was a linguist and a researcher of traveling motifs—that is, literary motifs traveling between various literatures. He spent most of his life as a librarian. When he graduated from the University of Jerusalem in the early 1930s, there were, I believe, more professors than students of comparative literature in Jerusalem, with all those German refugees, so he never quite made it to being a university lecturer.

ASG: In some of your interviews you mentioned that you weren't taught any foreign language as a small child, although your father was fluent in fifteen. When did you start learning foreign languages?

AO: It's not quite true. As a small child I could say, "Yes," "No," and "British go home" in English—and that screaming rather than saying—but that was just about my entire vocabulary until I was eleven or twelve, when I started English in school. I was privileged to have a sweet little English teacher in my kibbutz secondary school, a Hungarian lady who had never set foot in any English-speaking country but was nonetheless the most Anglophile of all Anglophiles. Every flaw in my accent I should probably blame her for, but then, because of my feelings for English, I should be grateful to her.

ASG: What about the dedication of your novel *Elsewhere, Perhaps* to your mother?

AO: My mother died when I was twelve or so, and *Elsewhere, Perhaps* was my first novel. My mother was a great reader. I knew she had a special thing about novels. More than just once when I was a kid she expressed the hope that one day I would write a novel—which I intended to do anyway, since I was five or so. So again, it was only natural to dedicate *Elsewhere, Perhaps* to her memory.

ASG: Was she not at home in Israeli society? I get the sense that in many of your stories there are women who are unhappy, refugees who can't really accustom themselves to being in Israel.

AO: The short answer to your question is yes, you are right, and the long one would take me a trilogy to expound. I am not quite through with that, so you have the short one. Then, you know, the very term "happiness" is somewhat alien to me: the more I think about it, the more I tend to believe that happiness is a Christian concept. Even the word "happiness" cannot be properly translated into Hebrew. We Hebrew speakers have a term which means joy—"simcha," but

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that's not quite happiness; we also have a term "osher," which is usually used as the equivalent of the English "happiness," but it means something slightly different. It means a certain feedback, the positive confirmation from your fellow person or from above, implying a momentary pang of joy, rather than the idea of getting into some promised land and then leaning back and enjoying it for the rest of eternity. That's why I'm not entirely at peace with the term "happiness."

ASG: Getting back to Israel—are you engaged in any particular political activities there?

AO: Not at the moment, of course. I'm kind of loosely committed to the Peace Now movement. I don't have any official role within this movement, or any official role, period. I've never been a member of any secretariat, central committee, bureau, or whatever. But I guess sooner rather than later I'll feel that my blood is boiling, and the moment my blood boils I make a political statement, write an article, make an appearance.

ASG: Have you ever considered running for political office?

AO: I have been approached very many times by political groups, by friends—perhaps enemies—to do that, but I realized at a fairly early point in my life that nobody would write my stories for me, whereas Israel is full of potential prime ministers, presidents, generals, or prophets, so I think I'd be better off if I didn't run for office. The temptation has always been hovering in the air and the pressure has been put on me on and off for years, but I don't think I should do that. I am unable to say "no comment" to anything; consequently, I am disqualified as a politician.

ASG: How popular is your political position in Israel?

AO: That's one of the hardest questions. I may be exceedingly popular for some opinions, and not so popular for others. Of course it's common knowledge that I am an eminent dove in Israel, but I do have opinions about half a dozen other questions which may or may not be more acceptable. But as you know, the political system in Israel makes it immensely difficult actually to measure how public opinion divides over the hawkish/dovish rift because we have seventeen or eighteen political parties, which somehow blurs the entire picture. I don't know how many people would follow me if I raised the flag, if that is your question.

ASG: What are Peace Now's objectives now that Israel has withdrawn from Lebanon?

AO: The main issue is heavily populated Palestinian zones in the

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West Bank and Gaza. The Peace Now conviction about these zones is that Israel should never annex them, nor should it attempt to Judaify those territories by building settlements. To make it even emphatic, if all the heads of the Arab nations convened at midnight tonight and decided to give those territories—the West Bank and Gaza—on a silver platter to Israel for its thirty-seventh birthday, I would still say, "No thanks, this is bound to turn Israel into another Belfast; we don't want it." The other thing is the Peace Now conviction that it is time to reaffirm the Israeli national consensus over war and peace—that is, never fight an optional war, like the war in Lebanon. Fight only when the very existence of the nation is at stake. Nothing short of that justifies a full-scale war. Harassment, infiltration, terrorism, hijacking only justify sometimes limited military measures, as opposed to a full-scale war. That's Peace Now in a nutshell.

ASG: Why did you leave the Labor Party in the early 1960s?

AO: Because at that time I thought Ben-Gurion was leading the Labor Party into a policy which he described as "mamlachtiyut"—an almost untranslatable Hebrew term whose closest English rendering would be "statism." He was in the process of reducing the value of voluntary movements, minimizing the importance of individual responsibility in society. In short, he expected the Israelis just to sit back in their chairs and enjoy what their government was doing for them.

ASG: Prime Minister Levi Eshkol is a character in your latest novel, *A Perfect Peace*, set in 1966. Did you know him?

AO: Very well. Moreover, I loved him. Our acquaintance started with a now-archaeological business called the Lavon Affair in Israel in the early sixties, a complex political affair into which I will not dive right now. Anyway, I criticized Eshkol in a newspaper article. I was frightfully young at that time—about nineteen or twenty—and I called him all sorts of names of which I am somewhat ashamed now. He invited me for a personal conversation, gave me a wonderful monologue—you know this was a generation of monologue-makers rather than of conversationalists, as you could have seen in *A Perfect Peace*—and I quite thoroughly fell in love with him. This is not to say that I didn't scream and yell at him, and go on criticizing his policies, but I loved him dearly. He was a wonderful man. He was one of those very few politicians—and I have known many politicians in my life—who was humane all the way, who had a genuine

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sense of humor and a wonderful gift for hesitation. I know this may not be regarded as a blessing for a politician, but I believe only politicians who are capable of hesitating.

ASG: Did you know Pinchas Lavon, too?

AO: I knew him very well. In fact, he was one of the founding members of my own kibbutz, of Hulda. When I was there, he was not a member anymore, but he still held the position of honorary kibbutznik in Hulda. He used to come for weekends, and he had a strong constituency in the kibbutz. It was Lavon who inaugurated me into political curiosity, if not political activity.

ASG: What long-term trends do you see on the Israeli political scene?

AO: It's hard to be a prophet, coming from the land of the prophets; the competition is too harsh. But I'd say basically that Israel is on its way toward becoming a very Mediterranean society in many ways, and in this, I believe, we have the best prospect for future peace with the Arab world. The fact that Israel is less and less alien to the Middle East in some ways holds a certain promise in the long run, though not necessarily in the immediate future.

ASG: In your 1984 book *In the Land of Israel*, one of the most disquieting things was the little note at the very end concerning the chapter, "The Dawn," in which you interviewed Arab intellectuals, writers for the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Fajr Al-Arabi*. Although their position sounded fairly moderate as presented in the chapter of your book, the note informs us, as a postscript, that afterwards they denied many of the things they'd said to you.

AO: This has been the story of my life with many Arab spokesmen. Many of them in private conversation over a nice cup of coffee in London or in Paris, speaking English to me, would say things that, if not music to my ears, were at least reasonable and negotiable. The very same people, addressing their own constituencies in Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut and other places, would sometimes repeat the next day the most savage PLO line about the need to exterminate Israel altogether. Over the years I have painfully learned that what they say in Arabic to their audiences is a million times more significant than what they might have whispered into my peace-loving ear in private conversation.

ASG: Why do you think they do that?

AO: Fear. That's what they have said to me and I have no reason not to believe them—fear of their lives.

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ASG: You mentioned in your book that one of the previous editors of the paper had been kidnapped, never to be seen again.
AO: Yes, and a couple of Palestinian spokesmen who had the courage to repeat in public what they said to their Israeli counterparts in private were shot dead by their own people.
ASG: Do you think that anything has changed in Israel since you wrote the book?
AO: A hell of a lot has changed. Begin has gone, Israel is out of Lebanon, a certain realization about the limits of military power has dawned on Israel, possibly a certain realization might have dawned on the Palestinians—oh, a hell of a lot.
ASG: Is it for the better?
AO: I should like to think that, all said and done, yes, though at a very costly price in human lives. Israelis are more aware now of what cannot be done by military force, and the Palestinians are more aware now of their essential isolation in the world, and of the fact that, apart from token verbal support, nobody gives a damn about them—except, perhaps, for those four hundred thousand Israelis who demonstrated after the massacre in Sabra and Shatilla. I think that registered very well with the Palestinians. I don't expect Arafat publicly to hug Israel for that demonstration, or the Israeli Peace Now movement, but I think it registered.
ASG: Did you approve of the exchange of several hundred Palestinian prisoners for just three Israeli soldiers?
AO: It's not the numbers that startled me. I would have released any number of PLO activists or sympathizers or whatever, in return for our own captives; I would not have released convicted murderers.
ASG: In an earlier conversation with me, you said that *In the Land of Israel* was "technically nonfiction, but in some ways another Ozian novel." Could you amplify this remark?
AO: My method of working on *In the Land of Israel* was essentially not very different from my method of working on novels or stories. I work with a polyphony of voices without necessarily taking sides with one character or another. I try to give a fair hearing, a fair understanding, a fair voice to each one of my "fictitious" characters—which is exactly what I did in *A Perfect Peace*. I was thrilled by the variety of powerful, convincing, yet contradictory opinions when I was working on that collection of interviews.
ASG: Even the orthodox fanatics?
AO: In a paradoxical way, while working on those interviews, I almost loved even what I hated.

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ASG: One individual whom you interviewed was identified only as "Z". His extreme position is announced with so much force and conviction that some Israeli writers have suggested that you invented this character. Is that so?
AO: No, how could I? Even if I wanted to invent such a character, I couldn't. The man is as real as you or I. The fact that he lacks the courage to come forth and identify himself has given me a lot of trouble. But he is alive and kicking.
ASG: Stripped of its flamboyant rhetoric, his monologue doesn't sound all that far removed from something you talked about during your speeches in Berkeley and San Francisco last year, namely about the need to accept Israel into the community of nations as no better, nor worse than any other, and not expecting impossibly moral things from it.
AO: I am not entirely antagonistic to those opinions about the hysterical moralizing attitude toward Israel.
ASG: Getting back to your writing in general, you don't seem to be on the whole what one might call a "realistic" writer, either in style or subject matter. What are you attempting to do in your narratives?
AO: In the first place, the term "realism" is meaningless because it comprehends everything—dream, fantasy, nightmare. Everything that humans have experienced, one way or another, is part of reality. Consequently, to me everything is equally realistic or unrealistic. I'm trying to do exactly what a tribal conjurer used to do perhaps twelve thousand years ago: tell stories in order to ease some of the pains and soothe some of the fears of my fellow-tribesmen.
ASG: Do you get feedback from your readers?
AO: Oh, and how! Readers calling the author in the middle of the night, asking him in bursts of fury, "How could you do that to this character?" or worse still, "How could that character say or do such a terrible thing?"
ASG: How about your readers at Kibbutz Hulda?
AO: The kibbutz is very tolerant. I have a milieu which is very frank and candid with me, and I confront the whole range of responses. On the other hand, I am not treated in the kibbutz as the novel-writer; I'm rather treated as one of the quickest waiters in the dining room. It's my standing reputation.
ASG: Have you ever thought of leaving the kibbutz?
AO: Many, many times, but I've never decided to do that. There are hardly options which haven't crossed my mind, in any area, but so far I haven't decided to leave the kibbutz, and I'm not likely to decide

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this in the foreseeable future. There is not enough in any alternative to attract me.

ASG: How has being there influenced your writings?

AO: It has in every way possible. Certainly it evoked and fed my curiosity about the strange phenomenon of flawed, tormented human beings dreaming about perfection, aching for the Messiah, aspiring to change human nature. This perpetual paradox of magnanimous dream and unhappy reality is indeed one of the main threads in my writing.

ASG: On a practical level, was it difficult to juggle writing and work on the kibbutz, or did it come naturally?

AO: There was a process of creeping annexation for a time. You can't just stand up one bright morning and tell the rest of the community, "No more picking cotton or weeding the fields or driving a tractor because I'm a writer." What I actually did was first appeal for one day off work each week, and eventually, with the publication of a book and then another book, appeal for another day off and yet another day off work. It's all based very much on trust and a kind of family relationship. I had time off for writing even before I became a source of income for the kibbutz.

ASG: You've published fiction in a variety of styles and forms. Is there a literary prose form that you'd like to attempt that you haven't already?

AO: I'm working now on an epistolary novel, consisting entirely of an exchange of letters between a cast of characters—letters, telegrams, a couple of legal documents, no narrator whatsoever. I find it difficult and fascinating. This one is set in the second half of the 1970s; to be more precise, in 1976.

ASG: You've said on previous occasions that you don't like to talk about your work in progress.

AO: I said then and I'd repeat it now: I'm frightfully reluctant to expose my pregnancy to x-rays.

ASG: Do you ever write poetry?

AO: Yes, I do, but I don't publish it; I don't have any motive. I'm satisfied with what I can do in poetry, and yet I don't have the slightest urge in me to share it with others. Maybe when I'm sixty-four.

ASG: How do you start a novel? What comes to you first?

AO: Characters, characters. It's a type of possession. Characters whom I don't especially like and whom I sometimes try to resist with

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all my might—having surrealistic dialogues with those embryonic characters in the way of telling them to go away, to look for some other writer. *My Michael* is an interesting example of that. It is told, as you know, from a woman's point of view, in the first person, an undertaking which in sound mind I'd never take upon myself. Who am I?—which is exactly what I told this lady when she kind of invaded me. I said, "Go to a female writer. I can't possibly write your story in the first person. What do I know?" And by God, she argued bitterly, saying, "If this is the case, you can't write anybody's story. You can't write about anybody who is older than you are; you can't write about anybody who is less intelligent or more intelligent than you are; you can't write about anybody but yourself." And she might have a point there. Nonetheless, I resisted her for a fairly long time, and it was only when I felt that either I write her story for her in first person or else she'd never let me go that I wrote her in order to get her out of my system. Now a character usually brings with him or her a cast of other characters. They always come first; then setting, plot, and so on.

ASG: *My Michael*, which was made into an Israeli film in 1975, would seem the least likely of all your books to be made into a movie, since so much of it goes on inside the mind of the narrator.

AO: That's exactly the way I felt about the project when Dan Wolman first came to see me. I said to him, "Why not *Elsewhere, Perhaps*, which is much more cinematic than *My Michael*?" He insisted; he said, "So it is a challenge." After he told me what he had in mind, I said, "You go ahead. I'm not going to be part of it. It's a different musical instrument, like playing a violin concerto on the piano. Go ahead, and for God's sake don't try to force the piano to sound like violin because that would be grotesque." He didn't, and I believe the result is a decent, low-key, interesting film experiment.

ASG: Would you say that *A Perfect Peace* was a political novel?

AO: In the broadest sense, anything is political. It's not a novel which conveys any specific message. It is political only in the sense that life is political, that love is political. In a way, *A Perfect Peace* is also a novel about how a group of ecstatic revolutionaries and world reformers gradually fade away, giving room—perhaps the right English word is compassion.

ASG: While Azariah is trying to get into the kibbutz, Yonatan is trying to opt out of his society. In a way, the beginning of *A Perfect Peace* reminded me somewhat of Melville's tale of Bartleby the scrivener,

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who "prefers not to." Did you seen any kind of inspiration there for the opening of the novel?

AO: I certainly never thought of it before, but now that you mention it, there might have been a certain amount of inspiration. These things do not work consciously. I won't swear an oath there was; I won't swear an oath that there wasn't, either.

ASG: How have women critics in Israel treated you? That is, how have they reacted to the treatment of women in your stories?

AO: Women critics usually took to the extreme: either "How dare you?" or else "How could you know?"

ASG: I wondered, for example, that in *A Perfect Peace* you have the irrational, shrewish Hava and the very childlike, simple-minded Rimona. There doesn't seem to be any normal woman.

AO: Personally I'm not a great believer in normalcy. And if you look, you'll hardly find a normal man in this novel, either. But I am not making any statement about women in general. No, Hava is Hava, and Rimona is Rimona. In some other novels I have different types of women.

ASG: There are so many unhappy marriages in your novels, so many bitter women.

AO: How about the epilogue to *A Perfect Peace*, where this trio lives kind of contentedly? That's a good marriage. Who says marriage takes two? Why not three, or six, or eleven?

ASG: Well, let's just say that in several of your stories there's a situation where you find—as, say, in *My Michael*—a rather meek, good-natured, rational man with an irrational wife who's impatient with his traditional virtues; a mismatch of personality types between the idealistic husband—unassuming and . . .

AO: . . . boring sometimes, pedestrian—with a dreamy, capricious woman.

ASG: I wondered why Michael put up with Hannah so long.

AO: I guess there is more between the two of them than appears on the surface. She opted for the kind of security and stability which he could offer her, whereas he probably chose what I'd describe as a colorful option in his otherwise fairly gray life. So it may not be as totally unhappy as it seems on the surface. Or, to put it in different words, self-indulgence may be a legitimate part of the game; expressing complaints and anger may be one of the components of being sated and content. Anyway, these are generalizations. In the early days of Zionism, in the then-Palestine there was something about the sexes' relation which strikes me as wrong. They pretended

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at that time to have liberated women before women's lib, with women drying the swamps and irrigating the desert and whatnot, and even a certain lady for Prime Minister in the seventies. But the assumption was that in order to become equal to men, woman had to give up their femininity; there would be perfect equality between two males sexes, the old one and the new. It couldn't work, and it didn't work. As a result, I believe that in my own formative years, there was a lot more sadness among women than among men. The Zionist enterprise was far more demanding on women.

ASG: Your collection of short stories known as *Where the Jackals Howl*, which appeared here in 1981, has a curious publication history. It was your first book, published in Hebrew in 1965 and later revised in 1976. Most novelists don't bother to revise their published writings. How come you did?

AO: I don't usually reread what I've published. In this particular case, I did, and I didn't like what I saw. These were frightfully early stories. Some of them I wrote at the age of nineteen or twenty, and when I began to write, I had this urge to prove to the rest of the world that I knew Hebrew better than anyone else. Consequently, I put on more or less my entire linguistic wardrobe—summer frock, winter coat, pair of shoes, boots, scarf, anything I had—because I needed at that age to show off. When I rewrote the stories, I considerably lowered the linguistic level, threw away tons of adjectives and adverbs, turned it into a less poetic and more prosaic collection. I didn't change the plots, though, or the characters. The translation is based on the later version, of course. I wouldn't allow the early version to be translated into any language. Ideally I would have destroyed it altogether if I could.

ASG: One of the themes in your fiction seems to be the opposition of rational, right-minded types and those who tend to give in to the dark forces, who aren't sensible, who are the voices of nightmare. Much of fiction seems so pessimistic and bleak.

AO: I don't buy that. You know, optimism/pessimism—it's not part of my vocabulary, the way I think. I wish to think that, yes, I deal with demons from time to time, and with death, despair, and loneliness—but part of it is the result of the fact that I also deal with magnanimous dreams, with messianic expectations, with great believers who aspire to no less than change human nature in one blow, especially the kibbutz stories, but also in *The Hill of Evil Counsel* and *Unto Death*. Now, the deeper, the greater, the more ecstatic the vision is, the more painful the limits of human nature seem to be. This perpet-

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ual interplay between magnanimous, meta-human dreams and petty realities—like the blocked drainage in "Late Love"—that's partly what I'm all about.

ASG: Your third novel, *Touch the Water, Touch the Wind*, was probably your most puzzling work, at least for critics in this country, who didn't quite know what to do with it.

AO: You paint a bird and then the critics tell you that this is a flawed goat. It is a fairy tale, my substitute for a three-volume, nineteenth-century family saga. Basically I was trying to deal with the hopeless infatuation of Jewish intellectuals with infinity, with morality, with redemption, with the Messiah. I was trying, again, to be very tongue-in-cheek about the heights of the expectations and the limits imposed on all of us by being human. I think it's a rather funny book. Most critics in this country failed to see it in this spirit. Alfred Kazin was probably the only one who read this book in the way it should be read.

ASG: You've also published a book for children, *Soumchi*. What was it like writing a book for children? It doesn't seem that different from your other stories.

AO: I guess it's not. It was fun. I wrote it while recovering from a very bad car accident. My wife used to push me in a wheelchair to my workroom for two or three hours each afternoon, then come collect me later, and in four weeks or so this one was written. I enjoyed every moment of it. I'd write and laugh at what I saw before me on the paper.

ASG: Do you think that you'll do any more writing for children?

AO: I would love to, but it's not up to me. People assume I have utter freedom of choice when it comes to subjects—sort of waking up in the morning, scratching my head, and asking myself, "What am I going to write about next?" It doesn't work that way. The characters select me, rather than I select them.

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Roger Copeland

THE MORALITY OF BALLET

We often picture the balletomane as a dandy or an aesthete, a well-bred (perhaps overbred) man of leisure who values style above all else and who is apt to argue that "beauty" is essentially an amoral, if not immoral, phenomenon. If forced to choose between virtue and virtuosity, the balletomane will always opt for the latter. That at least is the popular stereotype. But when one examines the actual writings of the great balletomanes—André Levinson, A. K. Volinsky, Adrian Stokes, Rayner Heppenstall, Lincoln Kirstein—it soon becomes evident that ballet appeals to them for reasons that have as much or perhaps more to do with ethics as with aesthetics.

This, no doubt, will come as a surprise to many people, especially those familiar with and perhaps sympathetic to the sort of moral indignation that led the early modern dancers to reject classical ballet. To them, classical ballet remained an "aristocratic" form of entertainment unsuited to the needs of a modern democracy; it lacked "sincerity," had nothing to do with the "real" world, and consisted of little more than a hollow, decorative, arbitrary display of technique. Or else it was said to deform the anatomy in ways that were particularly injurious to women. Contemporary feminism (and health consciousness) have revived many of such concerns: the body image favored by classical ballet is said to encourage—perhaps even necessitate—anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Consider the combativeness of ballet's arch-enemy Isadora Duncan:

> To those who still enjoy [balletic] movements for historical or choreographic or whatever the reasons, to those I answer: They see no further than the skirts and tricots. But look—under the skirts, under the tricots are dancing deformed muscles. Look still further—underneath the muscles are deformed bones. A deformed skeleton is dancing before you. This deformation through incorrect dress and incorrect movement is the result of the training necessary to the ballet. The ballet condemns itself by enforcing the deformation of the beautiful woman's body! No historical, no choreographic reasons can prevail against that!

Today, most of us readily recognize the grossly exaggerated nature of this broadside against ballet, but we're still apt to believe

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that the modern dancer has a firmer purchase on the mantle of morality. Ballet, in other words, may not be immoral, it's just "amoral." Certainly, compared with the socially-engaged modern dances of the politically active thirties (Charles Weidman's "Lynch Town" for example) or the sort of recent work performed under the auspices of Dancers for Disarmament, classical ballet may not seem especially concerned with "moral" matters.

But the ethical underpinnings of classical ballet transcend particular causes or advocacies. The morality of ballet is a morality of form—not content—a morality implicit in the very nature of classical technique (a moral reconditioning, if you will, that penetrates to the very heart of habit). The pioneer modern dancers eagerly dismissed classical technique as impersonal and mechanical. To which the balletomane André Levinson replied, "You may ask whether I am suggesting that the dancer is a machine? But most certainly!—a machine for manufacturing beauty." But not just beauty, or at least not beauty in the abstract. "To make a dancer of a graceful child," notes Levinson, "it is necessary to begin by dehumanizing him, or rather by overcoming the habits of ordinary life." And to the balletomane, ordinary life is slack, both morally and aesthetically.

The moral dimension of this physical reconditioning is particularly evident in the writings of the Russian balletomane A. K. Volinsky. In his *Book of Exultation*, he argues that the verticality or uprightness of classical ballet is endowed with profoundly *moral* connotations. Indeed, throughout the history of Western civilization, the concept of uprightness has been synonymous with honesty. "The Greeks," he notes, "set the vertical in opposition to the bent and crooked, not only in geometrical but in the comprehensive and spiritual meaning of the word. To see straight, to speak straight—all this is at once pictorially sensible and heroic. An upright city is a city of good and high morals that rests firmly on its foundation in a state of political and economic welfare. . . . Only in ballet do we possess all aspects of the vertical in its exact mathematically formed, universally perceptible expression. Everything in ballet is straight, upright. . . ."

Uprightness is also synonymous with openness, and balletic turnout—the principle upon which all classical training rests—serves to "open" or reveal the dancer to the audience that constitutes his public. (We might think of this as an aesthetics of full disclosure.) The outwardly focused nature of ballet is a theme that weaves its

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way through the writings of all the balletomanes, but it is especially central to the thinking of Adrian Stokes. "Turning out," writes Stokes in *Tonight the Ballet*, "means that the dancer, whatever the convolutions of the dance, continually shows as much of himself as possible to the spectator." Ballet for Stokes is the most "externalized form of dance," and he contrasts it with other dance forms—especially non-Western forms—"that symbolize an intensification of . . . mystery." By contrast, ballet connotes perfect clarity and intelligibility.

Rayner Heppenstall, in his *Apology for Dancing*, uses this argument as a strategy for turning the tables on the modern dancers, in effect, challenging their claims of moral superiority. To Heppenstall, the modern dancer's emphasis on "inner" experience is implicitly antisocial. He accuses Isadora Duncan, for example, of having initiated a voyeuristic fascination with matters "private" and "internal." Classical ballet by contrast "can have nothing to do with anything that is private or internal."

The idea that classical ballet serves a public and explicitly moral function is also a recurring theme in Lincoln Kirstein's writings; indeed for Kirstein, aesthetic and ethical arguments are often inseparable. In his essay, "Classic Ballet: Aria of the Aerial," he challenges conventional wisdom about the essential differences between classical ballet and modern dance:

> It was proclaimed that main differences between modern and ballet were between principles and technique, as if one lacked skill, the other, morality. . . . Rather, difference was and is between accidental idiosyncrasy against tradition, personalism versus collectivity, discontinuity as opposed to an unbroken line. Modern Dance opted for self-expressive originality. . . . Self-expression triumphed without providing either a cohesive teaching method or a repertory past individual utterance.

Kirstein is here referring to the fact that very few modern dance companies survive the passing of their founders. In other words, modern dance is too closely tied to the self-expressive idiosyncrasies of particular individuals. It's no coincidence that modern dance companies are almost invariably named after their founders. Referring, by contrast, to The New York City Ballet, Kirstein notes, "Balanchine would not have called the company the Balanchine Ballet, which was suggested and which he always resisted. He knew the classic dance was stronger than any individual."

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Clearly, Kirstein takes a very dim view of the idea that art is essentially a matter of "self-expression." His models and mentors are (of course) Balanchine and Stravinsky, those exemplary "Neoclassicists" who reshape older traditions in modernist terms, rather than attempting to reinvent the choreographic wheel. The very notion that art might emerge wholly from "within" the artist strikes them—Kirstein suggests—as a form of blasphemy:

> [Balanchine and Stravinsky] represent a non-romantic type of twentieth century "maker" (rather than "creator"). They use (the word) "creation" sparingly in regard to their own work, agreeing that once the term referred only to One before whom there was nothing but an undifferentiated void, and after whom everything was successive rediscovery or adaptation. We speak loosely of a new dress as a "creation" or attend classes in "creative" writing; these strike them as heresies as undignified as they are unlucky.

But in Kirstein's view this is precisely the heresy of modern dance; the choregrapher "competes" with God, attempting to create an utterly new vocabulary of movement. The limitations of the modern dancer are those that beset any artist who refuses to acquaint himself with—or avail himself of—the cumulative resources of tradition. By contrast, Kirstein suggests that "ballet's vocabulary depends on muscular and nervous control deriving from four centuries' research in a logic combining gross anatomy, plane geometry, and musical counterpoint." And the resulting artwork draws upon a collective wisdom that transcends the limitations of individual "creativity."

This may sound like a purely aesthetic argument, but it is, in fact, ethical as well; for Kirstein's insistence that the choreographer collaborate with the objective, inherited resources of tradition also helps promote what he calls "the conquest of untidy egotism." And the modern dance choreographer who is determined to go it alone, to forsake these inherited riches, is accused of being (at least implicitly) antisocial, insofar as he is presumably either unable or unwilling to create within the shared, impersonal, inherited conventions of classical ballet. Indeed, this recalls Rayner Heppenstall's argument that "Isadora Duncan's objections to ballet are pattern-objections for nearly all the modern world." It also follows that the privileged form of early modern dance was the *solo*, whereas classical

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ballet is much more likely to project (and promote) an image of harmonious interaction between individuals and the collectivity.

Above all, classical ballet promotes the ethic (and ethics) of "impersonality." It was of course precisely this aspect of the classical ballet heritage that struck so many modern dancers as being cold and heartless. But the twentieth century balletomane is quick to point out that the cultivation of "impersonality" is essentially a form of humility and selflessness, a necessary counterbalance to the prevailing tendency of the age. We live, after all, in a culture that is endlessly fascinated with the personal lives of artists and performers, but often considerably less enthralled by the actual work they create or perform.

The performing arts are particularly vulnerable to this cult of personality, for unlike painting, sculpture, or the novel, they must be *performed* by particular persons. And the performer—it is feared—remains all too vulnerable to the vulgarities of exhibitionism (the sad spectacle of the self clamoring simultaneously for attention and approval). Mere "personality"—no matter how vivid or eccentric—is deemed an unsuitable foundation upon which to build a serious work of art—which for the balletomane means a *lasting* work of art, one that will, ideally, "outlast bronze and break the tooth of time." The performer is, alas, too much of his or her own time and not enough of eternity. (And sadly, in this country, many of our best-known performers are "television *personalities*," people who don't even pretend to possess any particular talent, people who—in Daniel Boorstin's words—"are known for their well-knownness.") Needless to say, the more fanatical varieties of balletomania are not without their cliques and personality cults, but the annals of ballet contain no stories comparable to those about Hollywood starlets who are fortuitously discovered one night sitting in Schwabs drug store. One can say with absolute certainty that in the world of ballet, sheer force of personality is never—by itself—enough. Hence for moral as well as aesthetic reasons, the balletomanes I'm concerned with in this essay all place a high premium on the pursuit of impersonality.

Mallarmé, in his influential essay "Ballets," had argued that "the ballerina is not a girl dancing . . . she is not a girl, but rather a metaphor which symbolizes some elemental aspect of earthly form. . . ." And Heppenstall elaborates on this Mallarméan theme when he insists that "[a woman *en pointe*] because of [a] change in significant line and stress and action, ceases to be significantly a woman. She becomes an idealized and stylized creature of the The-

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atre. . . . And there is a kind of eternal virginity about her. She is inaccessible. . . ."

The best-known manifesto on behalf of impersonality in the arts is T. S. Eliot's classic essay of 1919, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; and Lincoln Kirstein makes no secret of the fact that his own aesthetic philosophy is profoundly indebted to Eliot's. Although Eliot's specific concern is poetry, his comments are equally applicable to the other arts. In fact, few essays do more to illuminate the foundations of twentieth century neoclassicism, and for that reason, I'd like to quote several key passages from this seminal work.

Eliot is determined to demonstrate that "modernism" need not necessitate a break with tradition. Quite the contrary: for Eliot, the greater the contemporary artist, the more likely it is that he will regard tradition not as something oppressive and overbearing, but rather as a vital and continuing source of inspiration. Speaking of our modern fascination with uniqueness, with the way in which each work of art *differs* from its predecessors, Eliot notes,

> We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice, we shall often find that not only the best, but the most *individual* parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. . . . What happens is a continual surrendering of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

It is here that Eliot makes the all-important connection between historical continuity and impersonality. Note how completely this attitude toward "personality" clashes with the romantic idea that art is primarily a matter of "self-expression." In one of the essay's most frequently-quoted passages, Eliot insists that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality." Some of course would argue that this is a sure formula for sterility and aloofness, but Eliot anticipates such objections, adding slyly, "only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."

Note how literally Kirstein adapts the ideas of Eliot when he distinguishes Balanchine's modernism from that of the modern dance choreographer:

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> One aspect of modernism has been its effort to annihilate history, to create an art without precedent, to renovate sensibility, to canonize the New. We have had more than half a century of newness and suddenly it has aged. The classic ballet, born in the seventeenth century, combines historical legitimacy with contemporary manner. Its gestures are courtly, yet respond in accent, celerity, and syncopation to the colloquial cadences of the day. Balanchine has defined the 'modern' direction of classic ballet.

Thus the goal is not absolute "originality" (newness for the sake of newness, difference for the sake of difference) but rather a dynamic balance between the "objective," inherited conventions of the past and the "subjective" innovations wrought by the contemporary artist. Balanchine's continued reliance on the classical vocabulary codified by Petipa is of course the best example of the way in which these abstract principles translate into actual choreographic practice. For The New York City Ballet, the ethic of impersonality results in a hierarchy of humility in which the choreographer, the performer, and even the spectator all surrender to something older, larger and more permanent than their own personalities.

In the first instance, Balanchine invariably conceived of himself as the humble servant of the music that inspired his dances. This was nowhere more evident than on the first night of The New York City Ballet Tchaikovsky Festival in 1981. To the surprise of many (and the consternation of some) the evening began with the overture of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* followed by arias from two Tchaikovsky operas, *The Queen of Spades* and *Eugene Onegin*. Dancers were nowhere to be seen. And perverse as it may sound, this was simply Balanchine's eminently humble way of reminding his audience that they had come to attend a *Tchaikovsky* Festival, and only secondarily, a Balanchine festival. A similar example of Balanchine's self-effacing reverence for music was visible in *Duo Concertante* which he choreographed for the first New York City Ballet Stravinsky Festival in 1972. The musicians performed on stage, directly alongside the dancers, and during the opening section of the ballet, the two performers, Peter Martins and Kay Mazzo stood still and merely listened—with unmistakable attentiveness—to the music.

And Balanchine's relationship to the music is mirrored in the performer's relationship to Balanchine's choreography. The legendary violinist Isaac Stern once gave a group of students the following advice, "You don't use music to play the violin, you use the violin to

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play music." Similarly, Balanchine's dancers are there to exhibit his choreography, not vice versa. Furthermore, the Balanchine dancer is not called upon to subjectively "interpret" the work, but merely to "carry out" (in the military sense of the term) his instructions. Baryshnikov has said of the title role in *Apollo*, "The challenge is in doing the steps as they are set, without any adornment, without special emphasis." And Susanne Farrell in a recent interview argues that the Balanchine dancer upon whom a work is being set must be careful not to bring too many preconceived notions to the rehearsal. The danger, she suggests, is that the dancer will paint the choreographer into a corner rather than "being the paint" with which he works.

Ultimately, the same sort of "impersonality" is demanded of Balanchine's audience as well. His dances are intended to draw us "out of ourselves," away from our personal and habitual ways of behaving. For example, this is how Balanchine defended his choice of the Webern score for *Episodes*:

> [Webern] leaves the mind free to see the dancing. In listening to composers like Beethoven and Brahms, every listener has his own ideas, paints his own picture of what the music represents . . . Now how can I, a choreographer, try to squeeze a dancing body into a picture that already exists in someone's mind? It simply won't work. But it will with Webern. This kind of music, which Mozart and Stravinsky have also written, is like a rose: You can admire it deeply, but you cannot inject your personal feelings into it.

By preventing us from "injecting our personal feelings" into the work, Balanchine forces us to transcend our own "personal" experiences, thereby entering a shared and *public* realm. Louis Botto, in a famous interview, quotes Balanchine as saying:

> A lot of people go to the theater to see their own life, their own experience. We don't give them that at the ballet. . . .

Balanchine then goes on to defend the cool, impersonal tone of his work, arguing that a passionate emotional identification with the dancer often amounts to little more than a wallowing in one's own emotions:

> Some people think you have to cry to have emotions. Suppose you don't. Then people believe you're cold and have no heart. . . .

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> Actually when people cry they are only thinking of themselves. They think 'I'm poor, I'm unhappy, I'm lonely, why did my girlfriend leave me?' And so, beautiful music that is sad or a stage situation that is ethereal suddenly attaches itself to your personal life and makes you cry.

Many of Balanchine's and Kirstein's critics dote on the similarities between The New York City Ballet and a military institution like West Point—a comparison that Kirstein himself will readily and cheerfully defend. ("The School of American Ballet," he wrote recently, "was conceived to be a national service academy like the Imperial School in St. Petersburg, which held parity with the military and naval academies.") And Kirstein quips, "There are just three rules. One, there is no justice. Two, don't complain. Three, shut up or get out." Perhaps Arlene Croce was getting at something similar when she wrote that "Balanchine has managed to get American girls to stop thinking and start dancing."

Needless to say, this is precisely the attitude that so disturbs recent writers like Joan Brady in *The Unmaking of a Dancer* or Suzanne Gordon in *Off Balance: The Real World of Ballet.* Gordon for example believes that:

> Lincoln Kirstein and The School of American Ballet are instituting military discipline to train dancers as obedient children. Somewhere along the way, these creative people have been sold this bill of goods that talent flourishes on misery.

Kirstein obviously takes a more positive view of these matters, defending obedience, discipline, and sacrifice in a manner more ascetic than aesthetic:

> Balanchine's ballets can be read as icons for the laity, should we grant dancers attributes of earthly angels. These have sworn to disavow hedonism in a calling that demands transcendence of worldliness and possessiveness, an abjuration and abandonment of elementary self-indulgence. We can even discover in their aura an animal innocence as one aspect of the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of this world, for they sacrifice much enjoyment in ordinary fun and games of their fellows. They are schooled to serve paradigms of order—at least for the temporal duration of their performing—which, if well done, seem momentarily to give their audience something approaching peace of mind.

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Balanchine, on the other hand, conceives of the relationship between virtuosity and virtue more aphoristically. Kirstein recounts an anecdote in which a pushy American stage mother badgered Balanchine by asking him repeatedly, "Will my daughter dance, will my daughter dance?" According to Kirstein:

> A delphic response was the reply she received, sounding more oracular couched in French . . . 'La Danse, Madame, c'est une question morale.'

Coming in

PARTISAN REVIEW

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Ronald Hayman

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

When Jean-Paul Sartre was buried on April 19th, 1980, a crowd of over fifty thousand converged on the procession and on the cemetery of Montparnasse, while even more people watched on television. No philosopher has ever had a bigger audience for his funeral, though it was not his philosophy that had made him famous. In France, a country where intellectuals are still honored, he had for thirty-five years been the most celebrated intellectual. His face was familiar to people who had never seen him; his sayings were quoted by people who had never read his books. Witold Gombrowicz called him the Eiffel Tower of French culture. As a philosopher he was less original and less influential than Wittgenstein or Heidegger, but Sartre's importance does not rest on any single area of activity: we can say of him what he said of Proust—that his genius lies in the totality of his work considered as "the totality of the manifestation of the person."

As a playwright Sartre was highly successful but less innovative and less significant than Beckett or Ionesco. As a novelist he completed only one work, *La Nausée* (*Nausea*), his other three novels being parts of an unfinished tetralogy. The bulk of his writing time was devoted to political journalism and biography, but he can hardly be called a journalist, while his biographies of Baudelaire, Genêt, and Flaubert are not really biographies in the usual sense of the term. "Writer" might look like the best one-word description of Sartre, but it is inadequate. Quantitatively his output was prodigious—his bibliographers have calculated that he averaged twenty pages a day throughout his long life—but it was only when he was briefly in the army that he wholeheartedly pitched most of his time into writing. Before the war he would have liked to be a professional writer, but he had to earn his living as a schoolteacher until 1944, when he was almost forty. After the war his working life had two centers. He never enjoyed himself more than when he was philosophizing in his study, but his conscience was easier when he was functioning as a partyless politician, agitating, using his influence to champion the international underdog, fighting capitalism and imperialism, making speeches, editing a review, demonstrating, attending meetings, helping to organize political movements, traveling around the

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world, writing articles and books calculated to influence Communism from outside.

This part of his life was governed by his fame and his eagerness to be useful. Because he attracted so much attention from the media, his presence was constantly in demand, and he was generous with it, but a discontinuity grew up between his public life and his writing. The young Sartre cared enormously about his relationship with his readers. He revised, reshaped, rewrote energetically, often following Simone de Beauvoir's canny advice, and in 1946 he maintained that the author's work is incomplete until the reader has collaborated by letting the book slowly disclose itself until it is "a unified object" (so termed in his essay *Q'uest-ce que c'est que la littérature*). But once Sartre had become a public man his needs changed. Some energy went into maintaining his image. Should he visit the United States during the Vietnam War? Should he reject the Nobel Prize? Should he declare himself in favor of Israel's survival as an independent state? These decisions were not taken without careful calculation about how his supporters would react. No longer depending on books to give him a relationship with the public, he no longer worried about whether readers would—or could—collaborate with him. Writing had become a private activity. He even took to working in his room instead of writing in cafés. He had always been careless about losing manuscripts; he became less interested in whether his books were published, or if published, read, or if read, understood. Few people can have read the million and a quarter words that make up his Flaubert biography, and still fewer can have digested them. There was no question, later, of cutting, revising, reshaping, to make a book more accessible; what mattered to Sartre was the relationship he had with his own intellect while sitting at his desk.

Though the best of his work is important, his importance depends no less on his central position in European intellectual history since the vogue for existentialism, which started in 1945. He could not have remained in this position for thirty-five years if he had been averse to either inconsistency or opportunism. His uneven trajectory illustrates the problem of the intellectual caught between the impossibility of having and the impossibility of not having a relationship with the Communist Party. Even his philosophical pronouncements were liable to be adulterated by *realpolitik*. In 1957, when he decreed that existentialism could hand itself over to Marxism if only Marxism would "take on the human dimension [the existen-

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tialist project] as the basis for anthropological knowledge," he was behaving like the leader of a small country offering to make a deal with an irresistibly aggressive neighbor—he was an ideological Dollfuss trying to negotiate with a Communist Hitler. Wanting to change Marxism, Sartre believed that his best chance lay in offering a conciliatory package; had he succeeded, his main importance would have been as a political philosopher, but he failed.

Even if he solved none of the problems he tackled, he plunged into them more deeply than anyone of comparable intellectual acuity, and it will go on being impossible to ignore him as a model. He confronted not only the difficulties created by the divergence of Soviet practice from Marxian theory but also the problems produced by the disintegration of the great empires, while, in his eagerness to be useful, he experimented in different ways of making both his literary activity and his physical presence into political weapons. Like Brecht but unlike Flaubert or D. H. Lawrence, he cared too much about public issues to immerse himself in fiction about personal relationships. Though he theorized authoritatively about commitment in literature, he became—no less than other committed writers—a rope in a tug-of-war between the compulsion to develop his artistic potential and the obligation to exert influence through didactic writing and political action.

He was not ineffectual. In France he had more influence than anyone else over intellectual opinion. He raised the temperature of anti-American feeling, made it harder for anti-Semitism to surface, and improved the intellectual standing of the Communist Party. He played a major role in politicizing a whole generation of French students, and the leaders of the 1968 rebellion had mostly absorbed Marxism through a Sartrean filter; during the same year his influence contributed—Czech witnessess tell us—to the slackening of oppression during the Prague Spring.

Though he managed to complete nine original plays, seven short stories, and several screenplays, nearly all his other major projects in literature and philosophy were abandoned. How could the subject be closed? Why should it be? If energy had not been diverted into political action, he might have left less work unfinished, but this is by no means certain. He deeply disliked bringing anything to a conclusion. In 1938, as soon as *La Nausée* appeared in the bookshops, he started planning to revive the central character, Antoine Roquentin, in a sequel. At the end of both his major philosophical books,

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L'Être et le Néant and *Critique de la raison dialectique*, he indicates that the work is not to be regarded as complete. The gesture appears to be made more for his sake than the reader's, though there are those who applaud his failure to finish projects: he is shattering "the myth of the coherently finished text, the myth that the contradictions that gave rise to the work have been resolved by an apparently cohesive textual narrative" (*Sartre's Existential Biographies* by Michael Scriven). But he tried hard not to leave his promises unredeemed. After ending *L'Être et le Néant* (1943) by offering to follow it with a book on ethics, he went on until 1949 struggling with the problem of goodness: the notebooks contain even more words than the book, but he finally gave up. After finishing the first volume of the *Critique* in 1959, he wrote 782 pages (about 200,000 words) of the second. All this unpublished work was not entirely wasted. Some of the material from the abandoned book on ethics went into *Saint Genêt*; some of the ideas from the unfinished second volume of the *Critique* went into the Flaubert biography. The ideal way to read Sartre's work is not as a series of separate books but as a discontinuous and open-ended whole.

In the tetralogy *Les Chemins de la liberté* (a title which is misleadingly translated as *The Roads to Freedom*) he had relatively little difficulty in completing the first three volumes: nothing needed to be concluded. He wrote 223 pages of the last volume, *La Dernière chance*, and he did not give up hope of finishing it until nine years after publishing the third volume, *La Mort dans l'âme*—the title is mistranslated as *Iron in the Soul*. Other uncompleted projects include the autobiography, the enormous biography of Flaubert, *Le Psyché* (a phenomenological psychology), a book on Mallarmé, one on Tintoretto, *Les Communistes et le paix* (an apologia for the Party, abandoned in 1956 after Soviet tanks invaded Hungary) and *Pouvoir et liberté*, a collaborative book based on conversations with Benny Lévy (Pierre Victor).

Towards the end of Sartre's life interviewers often questioned him about the mass of unfinished work, but less is to be learned from his answers than from the sequence in *La Nausée* when with an exquisite mixture of pleasure and pain Roquentin decides to give up his work on a historical biography. "The true nature of the present stood revealed. It was what exists, and everything that was not present did not exist. The past did not exist. . . . For me the past was only a retreat: it was another way of living, a holiday, passivity." But Roquentin can now picture the subject of his abandoned book, the Marquis de Rollebon, more vividly than ever before. "I sighed, let

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myself lean back against my chair with a feeling of unbearable deprivation." His immediate future will contain no holiday in the past.

Two of the crucial questions about Sartre are "Why did he keep changing tack?" and "Why did he go on committing himself to labors that even he—and no one has been more of an intellectual Hercules—couldn't possibly have accomplished?" I cannot believe anybody has ever written more greedily and sensually than Sartre did. Even when he was in his twenties his satisfaction when a woman yielded him her virginity was almost eclipsed by the satisfaction of plucking words out of the air to describe the seduction, moment by moment, in a long letter to Simone de Beauvoir. He was never more impatient than just before starting to write. According to Jean Cau, who worked as his secretary from 1946 to 1957, he would come into the flat, when he had slept elsewhere, and immediately sit down on the hard chair at his desk, never stopping to take off his jacket and tie. He never typed, and the fountain pens he used—his friend Michelle Vian has kept several of them—feel as strongly impregnated with his physical presence as the stems of the pipes he smoked.

When he was writing letters, diaries, and short articles, his pleasure was unalloyed; when he worked at long-term projects, it was tarnished by ambivalence. Alternative work would be clamoring for his time, and simultaneously he would feel guilty about enjoying words instead of taking action. Something survived from his passionate boyhood identification with the heroes of adventure stories, from his fantasies of himself as the dashing rescuer of beautiful victims, and this helped to color his abortive adult forays into the Resistance and political activity. His constant restlessness derived partly from a mixture of romantic optimism and jaded guilt feelings. Even when he was writing about politics he felt that he should be fighting more actively against injustice; he also believed that he was wasting his talent as a writer. In 1969 he grumbled that almost everything he had written was "exactly the opposite of what I wanted to write." He felt as though he had spent the major part of his life working, like a hack, to commission, or like a journalist, in response to current events. This feeling is relevant to all those moments of conflict which had been prefigured by Roquentin's triumphant surrender—moments of reluctantly fending off a seductive alternative to keep faith with the project in hand, or moments of deliciously treacherous capitulation.

The betrayal was fourfold—a betrayal of his readers and his in-

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tentions, combined with a more knowing betrayal of literature and his talent for it. If anyone in France was qualified to succeed Gide, Claudel, and Valéry, it was Sartre, who instead took a principled pleasure in refusing to support literature as an establishment or as a way of life, treating it rather as a myth in need of demolition. According to Roland Barthes, Sartre's importance lies partly in his being the man "situated at the precise historical point of literature's disintegration." If the reason Leonardo da Vinci failed to complete any of his works is that he had such a high regard for the greatness of art, Sartre failed for the opposite reason.

Not that he could possibly have succeeded. His Flaubert biography was intended to swallow the ocean of available data. "We have at the outset no assurance that such a summary is possible and that the truth is not multiple." His object in the second part of the *Critique* was nothing less than to prove that history added up to a single truth, a single meaning which could be explained without postulating a divine, extraterrestrial observer. The Marxist viewpoint was valid, Sartre believed, only if dialectical materialism could be made to reveal the unity of history. Could its "diverse multiplicities" be viewed as "connected and merged in their very oppositions and diversities by an intelligible totalization from which there is no appeal"?

No doubt Sartre would have achieved less if he had not set himself impossible tasks; he poised himself in a highly unusual way between the past and the future. He pictures consciousness as a blank, aimed like an arrow at the task ahead. This idea derives from Husserl, but we need to look at Sartre's temperament to see why intentionality appealed to him so strongly. It is no accident that one of his favorite words was *dépasser* (to go beyond, subsume, transcend): like a runner, waiting for the starting pistol with his weight poised forward, or like a child trying to fall asleep on Christmas Eve, Sartre found it almost unbearable that the future hadn't already begun. *La vie commence demain.* Simone de Beauvoir has written shrewdly about his indifference to the present and the past. "Sartre refuses to admit that he has any identity connecting him with his past. . . . He rarely reminisces." He could talk with complete critical detachment about what he had said, written or done: "The truth is that he has already stopped recognizing himself in the old Sartre he is talking about. What he really is, he believes, exists in the future, and in consequence he never feels any vanity about what he has done in the past. . . . On

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the other hand he displays immense pride when he talks about what he's expecting to do. This is the metaphysical and unpersonal pride of a liberty which tries to be absolute, which refuses to be constrained by circumstances."

He was afraid of possessions, afraid they would possess him or anchor him to one place, one situation, one identity. Had he been inclined to keep the money he earned, he could have become extremely rich; instead he not only spent, gave and tipped with compulsive generosity, but supported a small retinue of dependents. The busier he became, the easier he found it to give money rather than time, attention or sympathy. Nor did he ever want to own space. For much of his life he made his home in hotels or in his mother's little flat, where his room was so small that he could not have kept many books in it, even if he had not been in the habit of discarding them as soon as he had read them. (His formidable memory had been strengthened by a lycée education, which involved learning long passages by heart.) The narrow divan became his bed at night, and in the morning, when Jean Cau arrived, "a fearsome smell of tobacco and nocturnal breathing, spread into an atmosphere you could cut with a knife, jumped at my face and into my throat. . . ." Cau then worked at a table which had to be cleared for lunch if Sartre was going to eat with his mother.

But with space on paper Sartre was lavish. He never squeezed additions or alterations into a margin, and whenever he had to cross words out he started a new sheet. He was in Italy with Michelle Vian when he wrote the preface to André Gorz's *Le Traître.* Arriving at the post office to mail the manuscript to the Paris publisher, she found that the cost of postage would have left them without enough cash to pay their hotel bill. With a pair of scissors she snipped off the unused paper from each page.

Sartre felt most at home in cafés and restaurants where he could annex space by dominating the conversation and exhaling smoke. He noticed that pipe-smoking made him feel like settling wherever he was, watching people and talking through reassuring clouds of smoke. But, like Kafka, he never felt more free than when he was writing, creating an imaginary space. Paper as magic carpet; pen as wand. But if he felt uncomfortable with the literary conquest of imaginary space, his discomfort had one of its roots in the awkward relationship his mind had with his body. After a paradisiacal infancy centered on the belief that he was beautiful, he huffily but systemat-

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ically tried to reject his body. To reassure his mind that it had nothing to fear from sibling rivalry with his maltreated body, he consistently ignored all the messages it sent out. He resisted fatigue, treated pain as if it were a challenge. To step up his productivity he made reckless use of drugs and stimulants, taking sedatives when he needed to relax. He resented the time he had to spend on washing, shaving, cleaning his teeth, taking a bath, excreting, and he would economize by carrying on conversations with Cau through the bathroom door. He had no personal vanity, took no pleasure in buying clothes. His shoes were bought for him by his mother—his small feet were the same size as hers. When his smoke-stained teeth began to decay, he refused to waste time on seeing a dentist, but even when his face was swollen with an abscessed gum, he would stubbornly settle down to work at his desk. He took immeasurable pride in his intellect—"I've got a golden brain"—but the punitive attitude to his body was based on the feeling that it could be written off. Occasionally he took exercise to keep fit, but the interest flickered only briefly, and he did not want to have his squint corrected surgically. If his constitution had not been exceptionally strong, he could not have treated it so ruthlessly. Throughout his life he smoked excessively, overworked exorbitantly, ate and drank carelessly. He had no hankering for the kind of balance W. B. Yeats craved:

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul. . .

Sartre went on bruising the body to pleasure mind, trying incessantly to outpace himself. When he defines man as the creature who is not identical with himself, he has Heidegger's philosophy as one of his models and his own habits as the other.

Nietzsche observed that all philosophy is "the confession of its author and a kind of involuntary unconscious memoir." With his pronouncements the philosopher is pointing to the "relative positioning of the innermost drives in his nature." Sartre's declaration of war against the idea of the self points to his hostility against the self as represented by the body. Even his insistence on free will and his resistance to determinism hinge on his refusal to see his own existence as conditioned by uncontrollable physical characteristics. The body, which he had not chosen, could be disregarded: his contempt for it encouraged him to believe that the individual self has no

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existence. Throughout his career he would find various ways of escaping from the first person singular into a partnership, into fictional characters, into groups, into political movements, into theories about the collective, into the self-oblivion induced by alcohol or drugs or extreme fatigue. In 1956–57 he made his most extremist pronouncements against the individual ego, praising Soviet man for subordinating his identity to the group and questioning whether anyone can ever accurately say: "I did it." Sartre's fanatical faith in the powers of the conscious intellect and his resistance to Freudian ideas about the unconscious are equally rooted in the same inner drive. Needing to believe that the human mind was capable of anything and everything, he was irked by the notion that it might be incapable of coming fully to grips with itself.

Privately he was more interested in dominating a group than in subordinating himself. Almost invariably friendly, he liked the effects he could have on other people more than he liked other people, and in conversation he took pleasure in pleasing. With his musical voice and his quick mind he had a genius for the chats that ranged among fantasy, gossip, and practical suggestions. As a companion he was charming, droll, endlessly entertaining. He talked rapidly, trying to catch up with his racing thoughts. With new acquaintances he seldom failed to make a favorable impression, but in a foreign city he was reluctant to ask a stranger the way, wanting neither to be seen as a middle-class tourist nor to "inflict a disagreeable presence" on anyone in the street. (*La Cérémonie dex adieux* by Simone de Beauvoir).

Though the drug-taking habit had its origins in a campaign to increase output, he began to take pleasure in the violence he was doing to himself. For about tweny years he "abused drugs a great deal" (as he put it) but never so much as while writing the *Critique.* He was taking corydrane and orthedrine. The unpublished Part Two, which was more ambitious, could hardly have failed, had he completed it, to be his most important philosophical work, but not content with sabotaging his chances of writing in a lucid and organized way, he was deliberately putting his life at risk: "As soon as one passed a certain point, one began to be destroyed, and the risk was a reality. One liked having blurred ideas which were vaguely interrogative and which then disintegrated. It also meant one could drop dead, but there was no knowing when."

Like Nietzsche, Sartre took an almost religious pleasure in the

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sense of battling against himself. There could be no complete dichotomy, of course, between mortifying the flesh and fighting the brain. In the same way that he resisted fatigue, he resisted his own ideas, challenged them, questioned whether it wouldn't be better to turn them upside down. Philosophically the habit of dialectical reversal was picked up from Hegel. Karl Marx, who had also picked it up, found, like Sartre, that it encouraged him to leave books unfinished. Both Marx and Sartre tended to define their position by making someone else's untenable and later to make their own untenable. They were both liable to start a book on the basis of convictions that were repudiated before it was finished.

Without setting out to provide a rationale for his habit of leaving projects uncompleted, Sartre does this in the *Critique*, arguing that human action always tends to become something different from what was intended. When a man looks back at his work, simultaneously recognizing and failing to recognize himself in it, acknowledging that it isn't what he wanted to do but that he couldn't have done it any better, he is being forced "by an immediate dialectical movement to acknowledge necessity as freedom's destiny in exteriority." This is a form of alienation, which invariably begins as soon as the individual objectifies himself in action. Other people can immediately rob him of his intention. Sartre was basing his ideas about human activity on his own activity as a writer, and there may be a connection between his misgivings about stolen or deflected intentions and his pleasure in abandoning positions he had formerly maintained. Inevitably this involved him in betraying friends, admirers and supporters who had rallied around the idea as soon as they saw it flying from his flagstaff, but since their support had helped to rob him of his intention, they deserved to be punished.

Even when he was young, his attitude to fans and supporters was highly ambivalent. Following the loss of his infantile omnipotence, the loss of his mother when she remarried left him with an uncomfortable awareness of a dichotomy between the impression he had of himself and the impression other people had of him. His strongest need was to be in command of their reactions to him. Lusting for fame, which could bring this power, he was aware of his brain as an aggressive weapon. Part of his need to keep shifting positions was the need to bring the weapon constantly into play. The boxer can never afford to think about what he did in the last round: what matters is what he is doing now. If other people got stuck with

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yesterday's ideas, that was because they were the audience. He was the champion.

But that's not all there is to it. Working and living are not separate in this man whose main activity is writing. Long before he took to using the ugly word "totalization" he was practicing an instinctive dialectic in which each part of his life must relate to the whole and the whole to each part, while the living subject makes his peace with the image he tries to form of himself from outside. Sartre's passion for biography starts out of an impulse, already strong in childhood, to visualize his own experience from the viewpoint of posterity. He tries to live biographically. He can never surrender himself to the experience of the moment without remembering it's already sliding into the past. As he says in *Les Mots*, "Try as I might to throw myself into whatever I took on, into work, anger, friendship, I'm always about to deny the self in me that wants it. I'm betraying myself in the middle of passion by the jubilant anticipation of my future treachery." With one eye on the biography that remains obstinately in the future, he can never enjoy the present. The book he's writing, the woman he's kissing, the words he's saying can never engage his full attention. The part belongs to the whole and the alternative futures never stop trying to push each other out of the way. Like Roquentin he comes closest to being himself at the moment of tergiversation. The commitment to betrayal and self-betrayal leads to a certain passivity, but it is closely intertwined with activity in liberating himself from attachments in day-to-day living. Nauseated or not, Roquentin's self-critical consciousness is the part of him that functions best; Sartre similarly observes himself observing, while the revulsion from emotional commitment is encouraged by identification of the self with consciousness as he portrays it—something which has no ballast and no substance. Nothing in his life must be allowed to obstruct transparency. Austerely Puritanical and ruthlessly ambitious he sacrifices himself, his projects, his lovers again and again while the destruction fuels his self-aggrandizement. His political passions are generous, and the generosity is genuine but compromised. He condemns givers of gifts as aggressors seeking power over those who accept, but he gives relentlessly while remaining endlessly on guard to protect himself against the generosity of others. When given presents, he gives them away; borrowing ideas he conceals his indebtedness, even from himself, knowing anyway that he will soon discard what he has taken.

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His capacity for change was heightened by his awareness that we must never expect to recognize ourselves in our completed work, that books and actions deviate like children from parental intentions. Sartre had an extraordinary capacity for change. Disliking the idea of the static self and refusing to be tethered philosophically, politically, or personally to any commitment, he believed he could transform his life like a snake sloughing off dead skin. Even physically he changed more than most people do, the slight, narrow-shouldered boy growing into the wide, squat man who was dubbed by his American friends "Mr. Five-by-five." When he was twenty-four, his ambition, he told Simone de Beauvoir, was to become both Stendhal and Spinoza; later, applying philosophy to politics and *realpolitik* to philosophy, he tried to negotiate a peace treaty between Marx and Freud. When this diplomacy failed, he fell back on a gigantic biography of Flaubert founded on a combination of Marxist and Freudian insights. By then the young Sartre who never voted had turned into the radical knight-errant who rode international airlines. The mature Sartre never tired of demonstrating, agitating, signing manifestoes, making political speeches, attending rallies; though, to seasoned politicians, he still seemed politically immature, incurably naive. Despite his formidable intellect, he never quite arrived at what he called "the age of reason," at adult stability, though the young writer who made up his mind that success would never induce him to spend less time on cafés, cinemas, or girls, had grown into the compulsive worker who always wore moccasins to avoid wasting time on tying up shoelaces. But the young man who declared that all anticommunists were swine had turned into an old man who declared that the Communist Party was the worst enemy of freedom, and the champion of individual freedom had denied freedom to the individual.

Yet while he took an almost perverse pleasure in asserting his freedom through protean self-transformation, he could neither learn from his mistakes nor keep hold of his most valuable insights. He had so much faith in his ability to form new theories that he forgot the old ones: rather than build higher on an old foundation he would start all over again with a new one.

Sartre had two styles of writing because he had two methods of writing. When he wanted to achieve a polished prose, as in *Les Mots* (*Words*), he would fill only the first three lines on each page, leaving space for multiple revisions of each sentence. Nor would he ever take

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drugs while writing what he considered to be "literary" works. But for him the distinction between "literary" works and "philosophical" books was less meaningful than the distinction between work which demanded painstaking writing and work which did not. If he approximated, while talking, teaching or lecturing, to thinking out loud, he approximated in most of his writing to talking, teaching or lecturing. His predominant feeling was that style should take care of itself, and that a writer should not waste time on painstaking revision of each sentence. He still enjoyed the process of finding the right words and arranging them in the right order but forbade himself to believe that the task of writing was any more than the task of extricating sentences from himself, as if the book already existed inside his consciousness. Drugs not only had the effect of encouraging this illusion: they seemed to be speeding the process of extrication, and, as he went on working in this hurried way, Sartre came to depend less and less on either observation or research: he wrote as if everything he needed was already present inside his brain.

This was something he increasingly needed to believe as he grew older. The future was shrinking as demands on his time were increasing. Always unrealistically optimistic about completing at least some of the projects that were in abeyance, he had more and more reason to hurry. The quality of his writing deteriorates as he relies less on new observation, information, research, more on knowledge he has accumulated, and more on drugs that seemed to make him go faster. In chasing after his ideas, he was also chasing after the creativity that had deserted him.

Much of his better, earlier, writing had depended on his ability to chronicle the play of consciousness, dovetailing the drama into accurate description of external circumstances. Some of his best prose is to be found in *La Nausée*, which is written in the form of a diary, and in his army diaries, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*. In these fictional and factual journals the pulse of the sentences excitingly follows the rhythm of Sartre's thinking, whereas the latter part of the Flaubert biography is written in amorphous sentences with flaccid rhythms. Judging by the number of words he was producing each day, the army diaries were not written any more carefully, but the life Sartre was living then was more conducive to good writing, though he never shut himself entirely off from new experiences and new social contacts, on which observations could have been based. While he was teaching he was alert to the people around him; *Les Chemins de la liberté* rests on his prewar friendships in Paris and on his experience

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in the army and the stalag; his later writing is not nourished to any comparable extent by the life that was going on all around him. He was allowing himself to be seduced by his own powers of analytical improvisation, rather like a composer who refuses to compose except by improvising. Sartre's fluency was prodigious, but even in his earliest fictions the narrative impulse was liable to be overtaken by impulses towards description, analysis and satire. At the same time as chronicling the movements of a consciousness, he was not only philosophizing about the nature of consciousness and the nature of reality, he was also competitively measuring himself against other chroniclers. The crude feeling, "anything you can do I can do better," was elaborated into a sophisticated game of pastiche. But once he had proved that he was capable of becoming the greatest French novelist since Proust, he lost interest in both artistry and art. "Artistic activity," he wrote in *L'Idiot de la famille*, "consists of devaluing the real by realizing the imaginary." Though he had been moving towards this position since his early work on the image, it does not seem that his sabotage of his own artistry was entirely deliberate, even if destructive and self-destructive tendencies were at work. Is he rationalizing these tendencies in himself or justifiably exposing them in Flaubert when he condemns the great novelist for making the world unreal by making himself into an artist?

The activity of philosophizing had never been entirely separate for him from forming theories based on generalizations. Traveling when he was young to new countries, he would start to formulate theories about them before he had given himself time to observe what was going on around him; later on, at editorial meetings of *Les Temps Modernes*, he would talk authoritatively and at length about books he had not read and films he had not seen, constructing elaborate theories on the basis of what he had been told by a friend. This tendency is paralleled in his later books by the pronounced drift towards abstraction. On a minimum of observation and research he erects a vast superstructure of theory. At the same time his growing distaste for literary artistry accompanied a growing aversion to subjectivity, interiority and individuality. Temperament and political conviction both pushed him towards the collective. A glance at the essays collected in the ten volumes of *Situations* shows how as time passed he concerned himself less and less with literature, art and the private self, more and more with politics and public issues. His mind was such that almost any experience or observation would prompt

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theoretical generalization, but he is at his best as a writer when he is drawing more on fresh memories of experience and observation than on his reflective abstractions. In *L'Être et le Néant* the brilliant analysis of interpersonal relationships seems no further removed from Sartre's private experience than the examples based on observation of café life. But implicit in his later much more grandiose idea of totalizing history is the dismissal of private experience as irrelevant. This is requisite anyway if the intellectual is to do what Sartre said he must do—put himself entirely in the service of the masses.

In this essay I have approximated to the method Sartre uses in his biographies. I have tried to give a synchronic impression of the whole man, summarizing tendencies while generalizing about traits which remained more or less constant and providing only the sketchiest indications of development from one phase of his life to the next. He stuck more rigidly than most men do to the strategies he evolved for dealing with everyday life. He worked, for instance, between fixed hours and regularly went abroad at the same time each year. But one of his reasons for needing rigid patterns was that he cultivated discontinuity so assiduously. He loved changing his mind, rejecting principles that had been vital, making a fresh start. He was consistent in nothing—not even in his love for freedom. But the full story of his divagations needs to be told chronologically.

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REMEMBRANCES

BERNARD MALAMUD

In 1976 I answered the telephone and heard privately an instantly recognizable public voice. I knew this voice with the intimacy of passionate reverence. I had listened to it in the auditorium of the 92nd Street Y reading an as yet unpublished tale called "The Silver Crown," a story so electrifying that I wished with all my heart it was mine. Since it was not, I stole it. In my version, I described the author of the stolen story as "very famous, so famous that it was startling to see he was a real man. He wore a conventional suit and tie, a conventional haircut and conventional eyeglasses. His whitening mustache made him look conventionally distinguished. He was not at all as I had expected him to be—small and astonished, like his heroes."

His voice on the telephone was also not what I had expected. Instead of bawling me out for usurping his story, he was calling with something else in mind. He had noticed that the dedication to a collection containing the stolen story was to my daughter, who was then ten years old. "Joy of my life," I had written. "I have to tell you," he said, "that I understand just how you feel." And he spoke of his own joy in being the father of his own children—but in such a way that it was clear he understood love as something both particularized and capacious, belonging to everyone. The more you have it yourself, the more you see it elsewhere. A magic barrel. When after a while we hung up, I recognized that I had been visited through this awkward instrument by an angel. I had been blessed, anointed, by an illumination of generosity fetched up out of the marrow of human continuity. Malamudian annunciations are not overly fussy, and are sometimes willing to materialize as birds or talking horses or even on the telephone.

After that, it became possible to say hello on occasion, face to face. But I always found this difficult. His largeness afflicted my courage. This, after all, was the very writer who had brought into being a new American idiom of his own idiosyncratic invention; this was the writer who had introduced the idea of blessing—virtue as insight, virtue as crucible—into the literature of a generation mainly sunk in aestheticism or nihilism or solipsism. The last time I saw

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him on a public platform—he was standing before the historic lectern at Cooper Union—he was reading from a work in progress, and since this was not so long ago, I imagine a grieving table upon which an unfinished chapter liturgically murmurs its loss. That meticulous and original hand will not come to it again.

The reading at Cooper Union: a straight back, a straightforward voice, tricky cadences hidden in it, an audience intensely alert to the significance of its own memory, taking in Presence and sending back the hunger of its homage. Afterward, there was, as always, the knot of admirers at his margins. But I fled him, afraid of so much light.

Consequently, I never learned, or dared, to say "Bern." So I settled on "Maestro," and it seemed just right, not merely because it reflected the stories with Italian landscapes, but because he is, and always will be, one of our Masters.

Is he an American Master? Of course. He not only wrote in the American language, he augmented it with fresh plasticity, he shaped our English into startling new configurations. Is he a Jewish Master? Of course. Some people appear to be confused by why he resisted being called a Jewish writer. I think I have this figured out, and it may be simple enough. It troubled him, and he was right to be troubled, that the term *Jewish writer* sometimes carries with it the smudge of so-called ethnicity, a cataloguing of traits or vulnerabilities in place of meaning. *Jewish writer* is a usage that often enough smacks of parochialism. And when it is put to that purpose it is a plain lie. The Jewish spirit is the opposite of ethnicity or parochialism, and this cry out of Sinai is all over the Maestro's work. It is everywhere.

"The important thing," Morris Bober says to Frank Alpine, "is the Torah. This is the Law—a Jew must believe in the Law. . . . This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you and me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes." Artists are never equivalent to their own characters, this goes without saying; but it is also true that to separate certain characterological strains from the blood and lungs of their maker is to do violence to the force of authorial conscience. Morris Bober is the whole soul of Malamud's sacral knowledge; no one can gainsay that. And in his own language, in the Preface to *The Stories of Bernard Malamud*, he wrote: "And let me say this. Literature, since it values

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man by describing him, tends toward morality in the same way that Robert Frost's poem is 'a momentary stay against confusion.' Art celebrates life and gives us our measure." So if this Maestro of humanity protested the phrase *Jewish writer*, it was the imputation of parochialism he was, with furious justice, repudiating. Whoever thinks of Jewish writers as "ethnic" has long ago lost the origin, intent, and meaning of our civilization; or, worse yet, believes that conscience and mercy are ethnic traits.

I danced with him once. We linked arms—wasn't this in Donald Barthelme's living room in the Village?—and twirled together. It was a wedding party, and the only music available was in the strong throat of the Israeli writer Matti Megged, who sang, in Yiddish, a song about a frolicsome rabbi with certain affinities to Old King Cole. The Rabbi Eli Melech calls for his fiddlers, his drummers, his cymbal-players; his phylacteries fly from him, his robes; he goes rollicking with the sexton, he cavorts, he carouses, he drinks! To this tune the Maestro and I danced, arm in arm, and we will do it again, I trust, when the International PEN Congress meets at last in the Garden of Eden, in Paradise.

He wrote about suffering Jews, about poor Jews, about grocers and fixers and birds and horses and angels in Harlem and matchmakers and salesmen and rabbis and landlords and tenants and egg candlers and writers and chimpanzees; he wrote about the plenitude and unity of the world. And that is why, in his memory and for his sake, I want to recite the Sh'ma, which calls us to listen to the indivisible voice of Unity, of Allness—that Unity and Allness in whose image all humankind is made, well-worn words that are found on the living and dying lips of every Jew:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד.

—that comprehensive vision of mercy under whose wings we stand.

May the memory of this great and humane Master be blessed and forever green. As it will be, as long as there are readers.

Cynthia Ozick

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SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Though the author of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir was not so unlike Eve. Simone was a man's gal, and not "one of the boys," as so many of her feminist admirers are now trying to be. Her man was Jean-Paul Sartre, and her relation to him and to his goals was not unlike Eve's to Adam and his God, as described in Milton's great line, which so infuriates our feminists: "He for God only, she for God in him."

Unhappily, even before his death in 1980, the goals that Jean-Paul Sartre had tried to achieve were generally seen to be void: Existentialism was finished as a philosophical enterprise; Sartre had renounced it himself, substituting faith in Marxism. Then this, too, he renounced; also, faith in Soviet communism, Maoism, and even Castro's kind of tyranny. And Simone had followed him in his faiths, and renunciations of faith, like him always striving to believe and never disbelieving in him. In one of her excellent memoirs, she summed up their experience thus: "It seems we were conned." For her talented enthusiasm—not reverence—for life, expressed in all her actions and reactions—and let it not be forgotten in an always readable prose style—we remember Simone as one of the leading feminine figures of this age.

Lionel Abel

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BOOKS

PETER HANDKE

SLOW HOMECOMING. By Peter Handke. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.95.

One always expects the unexpected from Austrian writer Peter Handke. In his previous novels, as well as in poetry and plays, he has displayed a versatile talent for rupturing conventional idioms to open a new aesthetic pulse. Yet Handke never shuffles traditional forms merely to pull off a nihilistic joke; his ouevre is not driven by a camp-like cynicism that views the surface as everything (and thus, ultimately, nothing). Instead he has set about portraying something quite the opposite. Influenced by the later Wittgenstein, Handke has focused on the implausible task of rendering "what cannot be spoken of"—the realm of meaning that eludes the language of fact. In his earlier novels—*A Moment of True Feeling*, *Short Letter*, *Long Farewell*, *The Left-Handed Woman*, and *The Weight of the World*—he achieved this, in part, by microscopically recording the banal texture of daily reality and then opening this out so that what had escaped description hovered like an aura, silently, at the forefront.

In *Slow Homecoming*, he employs this technique to explore what is arguably the most awkward and poignant—and least spoken of—predicament of our disoriented period: namely, how can one salvage a self in an age that has lost coherent meaning? Echoing the ancient story of Odysseus's journey, Handke sets his no-self protagonist, Sorger (the name means "worry" and "anxiety") off in a faraway land, Alaska, and slowly brings him home to Europe and to himself. In the northern wilderness, Sorger, a geologist, cohabits a cabin with a colleague named Lauffer. But this "student of slopes," as Sorger calls him, turns out to be a chronic liar. Since Lauffer's name means "the messenger," one can deduce that Handke is aiming for more here than an intriguing portrait of a guileful character. Moreover, Lauffer doesn't lie out of spite, but because he is kind and wants other people to feel appreciated even though their company makes him "miserable." Through this allusive device, Handke is able to set up the crux of the dilemma that spurs the rest of the action of the novel: Sorger's groping efforts to orient himself with reality when "the messengers" of the outer world, that is, the facts, are deceptive. They offer a way of or-

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dering reality, but omit issues of profounder meaning—the psyche's role in construing a certain factual order, for example, and, beyond this, questions of a larger meaning to existence, which Wittgenstein returned to in his later years, although he could only pose and answer such questions with silence (by which he meant, as William Barrett has remarked, that there was something to be silent about). Facts give reasons, but no reason to live. And, at bottom, *Slow Homecoming* is an interior narrative of Sorger's quest to find meaning in his life.

"What do I want? What is real for me?" he asks. At first Sorger, who is "nowhere at home" and "has ceased to long for anything," simply struggles to "keep himself together" by scrutinizing reality "in the least of its forms—a groove in the rock, a change of color in the mud, a windblown pile of sand at the foot of a plant." Indeed, lengthy passages on the surrounding landscape dominate much of the narrative, which is organized in three sections—"Long Way Around" (the American journey), "Mount Ste. Victoire" (a pilgrimage to a mountain painted by Cezanne, which appears on the novel's jacket cover), and "Child Story" (a description of Sorger's relationship with his daughter). Yet these descriptions of time and place really serve as meditations on the relationship between the psyche and the world, or on the role of form in an abstract sense, rather than as realistic accounts. For Handke, such entities as form or fact are never unambiguous. Thus the geologist Sorger "never ceased to regard the linguistic formulas of his science as a hoax; the rites in which it apprehended the landscape, its conventions of description and nomenclature, its conception of time and space, struck him as dubious." Sorger fluctuates between wanting the landscape to reflect his psyche ("I would like to teach the landscape to be rational and the heavens to mourn") or to be entirely alien, so that he can possess a sense of self by differentiating his inner turmoil from it. Once, Sorger dreams that his brain is "a map of the world."

Needless to say, with this sort of ambiguity in relating to physical environs, Sorger's relationship to the other people he encounters are riddled with *angst*. (And one realizes how rarely one hears this painfully self-conscious, alienated voice typical of the earlier modernist writers today.) Mechanistic metaphors pop up persistently as Sorger fumbles to sort out his reactions to the people he encounters; even the native Indian woman he sleeps with in Alaska is spoken of as "a dangerous machine." Sorger wants someone to touch him, to restore a sense of limits so that he can regain an image of himself.

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But when he does engage in a physical relationship with a woman, he loses himself altogether. While this sort of material would make a classic case study in what clinical psychoanalysis labels "borderline and narcissistic character disorders," Handke is getting at something broader here. "This world with its functional forms, labeled in every detail, yet totally speechless and voiceless, is not in the right," Sorger says, and he remarks elsewhere, "Everyday life had become evil."

What the world has left out, Handke suggests, is precisely the individual psyche; "Individual destinies had simply gone out of existence," Sorger observes. Insofar as Sorger himself reflects this vacuity, he also shows the flawed object-self relations typical of narcissism. But his quest is entirely unlike the narcissist's puerile obsession with the presentation of the self; rather it concerns the more ambiguous question of defining ontology and moral legitimacy in an age that has lost its moorings. As T. S. Eliot and Spengler knew, escape into the rigors and routines of technique is the mass anesthetic in such a disoriented period. Sorger's despair, of course, is that the anesthetic doesn't take for him. He cannot stifle the still, silent voice that says the soul cannot survive in such a sterile climate.

So he travels, from Alaska, to Los Angeles, across America. Just before he leaves New York, Sorger has a moment of grace, when he feels "that the history of the world would soon be ended, harmoniously and without horror," and his eyelids are "anointed by an eternally wild need for redemption."

Back in Europe, Sorger makes a pilgrimage to Mount Ste. Victoire and engages in meditations on, among other things, Goethe's color theory and the use of birds in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings to guide the eye to infinite distances. ("And there was not one bird to save the landscape," he quotes from a Borges story.)

The final section, called "Child Story," is a description of Sorger's relationship with his daughter. Here Handke is clearly trying to render a culmination to Sorger's quest by implying its fulfillment in a state of pure being, represented by the child. Unfortunately, this does not come through with compelling force. The earlier, driving tensions flatten out, and one is left with a rather boring realistic narrative. Ultimately, Sorger's redemption seems false. When at the end of the novel he declares that every story about a child should end with the words, "Cantilena; perpetuating the plenitude of love and of all passionate happiness," one knows one is supposed to be feeling something reminiscent of, say, the epiphany Thomas Mann evokes

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after "The Snow" episode in *The Magic Mountain*, but it just isn't there. Despite this shortcoming, however, Handke must be acknowledged as one of the major voices in contemporary fiction today. By rendering, in narrative terms, questions of ultimate meaning, value, and the relationship between the psyche and empirical reality, he poses the fundamental issues preoccupying current, postmodern philosophy. And, by amplifying their resonance in the aching dislocation and uncertainty of one individual's experience, he leads us all onward, if not yet to a final coming home.

KATHLEEN AGENA

AN ODD FRIENDSHIP

DIALOGUE IN THE VOID: BECKETT AND GIACOMETTI. By Matti Megged. Lumen. $7.95.

A thorough study of Beckett's works, such as we still do not have, will have an awful lot of explaining to do, at least in the absence of an annotated *Collected*: the prose is replete with allusions and unfamiliar words, all of which get the student working hard on sometimes marginal things. This done, the study would have to introduce and explore some of his favorite concepts, such as pseudo-couple, quaqua, Belacqua bliss, asylum, microcosm, text, and nothing, with special attention to his little monograph on Proust, repudiated by Beckett (it has never appeared in French), but useful as an index to a state of mind which, although set aside, was seminal, and helps the reader to traffic with the use of enigma in such books as *Watt* and *How It Is*.

Matti Megged does little of this, intent as he is on one of those affinities brought out, in art, by André Malraux's *The Voices of Silence*. Now Beckett is as tough a nut to crack in seventy pages as Proust was for Beckett himself, and even tougher when half of the envisioned space goes to Giacometti, himself a taxing subject. All that would justify such a tight braiding of topics would be a keen, chronic understanding of both men's work and the revelation that they have much in common. Well, Megged has, and, as he reveals, the affinity is nothing forced; you wonder why no one has pointed it out before.

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In a sense, this makes his job even harder: there is something solid to mine here, and he has to do it deftly, almost like a miniaturist—without getting too aphoristic, without squeezing things to death. He has, at the same time, to cite and explain, to compare and contrast, without putting off the reader who has plenty of Beckett but little Giacometti, or vice versa. Remarkably, he pulls it off, fusing hemmed-in exposition with sophisticated commentary, making throughout the crucial point that, for both Beckett and Giacometti, style is what maximizes art's virtual incapacity to copy. For both, style is "more realistic than so-called naturalism," or, to use Giacometti's own words, "A realistic picture is a picture too unreal to become 'stylish.' The trouble with it is that it doesn't look like anything." So too, Beckett notes in his Proust essay, "the copiable he does not see," which Megged does not quote, though he might have. Early on, Beckett saw that art is not a brand of photography, but an irresistible emanation from within, distorting and deforming and, quite naturally, leading every artist to the brink of expressionism, a mental and emotional mode that too many American literary critics either overlook altogether or confuse with surrealism. Megged is good on these things, steering his way by implication rather than by outright textbook lessons; he writes for those already a little versed in stylistics, and he even manages to do justice to Beckett's plays, revealing their sculptural qualities, linking their visual spareness to Giacometti's own.

It is no surprise, then, to find on the first page the two of them, in 1961, trying to devise the right set for the revival of *Waiting For Godot* at the Odéon in Paris. They *built* the set together, juggling a bare stage, a tree, and a moon. Years later, Giacometti said: "We experimented the whole night long with that plaster tree, making it bigger, making it smaller, making the branches finer. It never seemed right to us. And each of us said to the other: maybe." As Megged makes clear, both men develop lifelong an intense sense of failure, feeling, as Beckett would put it, a compulsion to express together with the absence of anything expressible, but they part company inasmuch as Giacometti said a great deal about it whereas Beckett has been rather tight-mouthed except for some sibylline utterances in occasional interviews. It was not that they wanted the tree to be perfect; they just wanted it to be as useful as possible, as commanding as the right word, the right contour, in the right place. As it is, this so-called tree has always looked to me like some ricochet from Kirlian photography: a sprayed-out root system electrocuted where it stands—even a human nerve-ending blown up and made to stand every one of its

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fibers on end. I would have said it was successful, and provocative, beyond their wildest dreams; perhaps they looked at it too hard, unable to recognize the moment at which it settled down into something utterly appropriate because it could not be pinned down as tree or whatever. They both, as Megged shows, try too hard not to try too hard, and the fatigue conducts them into laconic misery, with Giacometti sounding like a Beckett character and Beckett seeming all the time to head for the denudedness, the strippedness, of sculpture, and its silence too.

I would not have expected it, but, maybe because Beckett is so sparing with comment on his art, I found that Giacometti elucidates Beckett better than any commentator I have read, with Megged coming in behind to touch in some of the finer points with worthwhile assists from Dore Ashton and Maurice Blanchot. For instance, all these Beckettisms come from Giacometti, who sometimes seems the latest recruit to what Beckett calls his troop or platoon of fools, his "vice-existers":

> I do not know whether I work in order to make something or in order to know why I cannot make what I would like to make.
>
> Why this compulsion to record what one sees? . . . It's the modern form of adventure for men who are left on their own.
>
> I have always failed. — If only I could draw! — I can't. That's why I keep on drawing.

And, where Giacometti doesn't quite come out with it, Megged fills deftly in: "The unlimited possibilities of nonrepresentational art are even more frightening than the impossibility of representing reality." One might sometimes push the thought of either man, or their presenter, a bit further, as when Megged notes that Giacometti "believed he really *saw* living beings only through their gaze"; yes, maybe the creatures of both these artists are trying to gaze at themselves only, and all else is extraneous.

Significantly, there is more to quote in this book from Giacometti, whose explanations always go beyond himself, telling us about not only Beckett but modern literature in general, and especially about the American fiction writers I have come to dub The Lost Tribe, who, without ever adding up to a movement or a school, have actually picked up where Joyce and Beckett left off, and have formed organic links with the *nouveau roman*, magical realism, and abstract expressionism, not to mention Schoenberg, Messiaen, and Cage. What

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they do, in a dozen different ways, takes something from Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* which Megged (rightly, I think) finds Beckett's most moving work, in which the words are "spoken just for their own sake." One thinks of Novalis's view that talking for the sake of talking is the sincerest thing we do, which in Beckett becomes a recitative of hereness: spoor, snailtrack, heartprints. And, of course, explaining that sort of thing to reactionary editors in publishing houses, or even to students reared on the copiable and the minimal in tandem, is wretched work. One of the moving things about this diligent, wise, and moving book is that Megged sees, in Beckett, literary art at last catching up with visual art, coming to the same problems and the same impasses, without ever quitting. There is something profoundly gladdening in the news that Giacometti "lived his life almost like one of Beckett's heroes," even at one point usefully trekking around on crutches like Malone himself. The sculpture named *No More Play* surely does evoke Beckett's endgames, and the one named *Life Goes On* embodies that classic Beckettian *possum quia impossibile* (Beckett once said that the animal he'd like to be is the possum).

Matti Megged, himself a novelist (*The Last Day of Danny, Mem*), has done us all a favor, with self-effacing cogency writing a book that goes beyond itself into the generative core of all the arts. All the same, I wish it had been longer, with more quotation from Beckett (which would of course enable him to quote Beckett on himself *in toto*!). The print is too small. The prose here and there is a bit too monofilamental for me. The past tense of *strive* is *strove*, not *strived* (page fifty-four), and one sentence on page thirty is quite misleading: "The atmosphere of Beckett's first stories in French, '*Texts for Nothing*,' and his novels is that of a dim twilight. . . ." The first stories in French were the *Nouvelles*, translated as the *Stories* in the volume *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (plus one other, "First Love"). A second edition should tidy these things up, especially if, as I hope, the book has come to stay.

PAUL WEST

THE QUESTION OF PSYCHOHISTORY

DECODING THE PAST: THE PSYCHOHISTORICAL APPROACH. By Peter Loewenberg. Alfred A. Knopf. $20.00.

Peter Loewenberg has crossed disciplinary barriers, and in doing so he has taken a great deal of flack. His detractors have accused

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him of doing bad psychoanalysis and writing bad history. Psychoanalytic practitioners have questioned the depth of Loewenberg's clinical acumen, have been skeptical of his use of clinical data, and have been quick to remind him of the obvious, that the dead do not free-associate, joke, dream, or provide us with slips of the tongue the way analysands do on a couch in an analyst's office. Analysts seem reluctant to admit that a specialist from the humanities or social sciences could achieve a subtle and incisive grasp of therapeutic issues. Historians, for their part, have been unacquainted with or put off by a psychoanalytic perspective. Only recently, and quite selectively, has historical training included an immersion in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Most historians trained in America lack a Freudian cultural background; thus they are ill-prepared to entertain psychoanalytic methods of inquiry and argumentation. Historians suffering from facticity, the fetishism of facts, cannot accept the untraditional forms of verification that go along with psychoanalytic interpretations of history. They are offended by analogical forms of thinking. They distrust speculative leaps about what *feels* right as opposed to what can be demonstrated empirically did happen. In two professions so ostensibly committed to the comprehension of the past, it is not surprising that mainstream historical and psychoanalytic thinking tends to be conservative, deeply resistant to interpretative and methodological innovations. For more than fifteen years, Loewenberg has bucked misrepresentation, misunderstanding, suspicion, and downright contempt of his work.

Decoding the Past brings together the fruits of Loewenberg's labors, and consequently provides us with an opportunity to write a preliminary assessment of his contribution. The volume consists of eleven essays, four of which are previously unpublished (a paperback edition just issued by the University of California Press includes an autobiographical preface). Subtitled *The Psychohistorical Approach*, Loewenberg has extended the boundaries of meaning in historical scholarship. He has done so with a good deal of modesty, with clear prose, with a modulated passion akin to analytic tact, and with meticulous attention to documentation and evidence. He makes no grandiose claims about his methodology. He is seldom messianic or polemical.

Loewenberg's psychohistory would be more accurately understood as a number of approaches. He has mastered a vast armamentarium of psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives and insights, beginning with Freud's classical model of instinctual drives and defenses, borrowing generously from the ego psychologists and Eriksonians who pointed to the adaptive as well as neurotic aspects of defenses;

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he is well aware of post-Freudian advances, including the multiple perspectives opened by the English object relations school and the current study of creative and pathological narcissism undertaken by Kohut and the practitioners of self-psychology. The contributions of Melanie Klein are not incorporated into his studies (except for a brief reference to Bion's work on group dynamics), although he is aware of them.

Just as the psychoanalyst who works with vastly different patients has to be equipped with a flexible assortment of therapeutic tools and conceptual frameworks, so too must the psychohistorian rely on a full assortment of psychoanalytic perspectives. Without multiple ways of understanding his subject, the historian will not be able to comprehend historical figures, mass movements, and seemingly irrational phenomena. In offering his readers plausible interpretations, not definitive truths or dogmatic assertions, Loewenberg remains consistent with modern historiography that is non-reductionistic and is opposed to one-dimensional causal explanations.

Loewenberg the psychoanalytic historian wrote this volume with two caps on, straddling two dissimilar universes of discourse, speaking to two different audiences. This is ultimately a strength and a weakness. Loewenberg has not, however, found the ideal kind of language which effectively bridges the two disciplines. That language has yet to be invented. Probably it will describe unconscious activity, impulses, fantasies, deficiencies and conflicts in a manner comprehensible to a literate audience. When Loewenberg treats analytic questions, his writing sounds like that in professional psychoanalytic journals, which are not celebrated for their prose. Loewenberg's grasp of often elusive psychoanalytic terminology is strong and subtle, which may please his audience of analysts. But it is bound to alienate his general readers. He might have risked being more personal, disclosing his own empathic immersion in his subject material and methodology in a style adopted by Erikson in *Gandhi's Truth* (1969), without a loss of clarity, scholarly balance and seriousness, and insight. Perhaps in his subsequent writings, he will be less concerned about following the accepted academic and psychoanalytic style of discourse, and will be at liberty to find an idiom more appropriate to his theme, closer to his own personal voice.

In two of his "Austrian Portraits," the study of Victor and Friedrich Adler and of Otto Bauer, intellectual history and psychohistory converge, and the convergence is illuminating. (Loewenberg

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documents "Dora's" identity as Ida Bauer, sister of Otto Bauer, one of Austrian social democracy's key leaders. Dora's identity has been well known to insiders in the psychoanalytic movement for decades, most especially by those trained by the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute.) In his study of Herzl, Loewenberg draws on diaries, autobiographical novels and short stories, and letters. He does not attempt to unearth and answer all the secrets about the founder of modern Zionism, but shows how he oscillated between dismal self-regard and swelling omnipotence which resulted in a blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality, ideas and people, action and dream. Without denigrating his achievement, Loewenberg's portrait humanizes and demythicizes Herzl, places him in a particular time and place, and fleshes out the inner dimensions of his life history.

In the essay on Victor and Friedrich Adler, Loewenberg ingeniously illustrates father-son generational conflict, hatred and love. He argues that Fritz's assassination of the Prime Minister of Austria in 1916 can be understood as a displacement and acting out of aggressively murderous urges toward his own father; his psychoanalytic sounding thereby includes the symbolic significance of this act of murder. In another essay, Heinrich Himmler is unable to integrate his unconscious sadism, cruelty, and severely regressed tendencies into a coherent identity. Identification with Hitler and incorporation of the anti-Semitic ideology and demonology had healing effects for Himmler while leading to horrendous consequences for European Jewry. Although it would be erroneous to generalize that all Nazi leaders had a schizoid personality structure, Loewenberg's portrait makes us reflect on political leaders, past and present, who overvalue toughness and who deny emotions.

Loewenberg's analysis of Nazi youth is a *tour de force* and a shrewd account of the mass psychology of the led. For German youth who came into consciousness in the late 1920s and early 1930s, unemployment became the shared massive trauma. Millions of men and women who found themselves helpless, confused, psychologically disorganized and fragmented, were receptive to irrational appeals and simplistic explanations for their difficulties. Therefore, a clever mythomaniac like Hitler could easily fill the political and emotional vacuum with his message of racial violence, revenge, and national honor. Loewenberg explains how the Führer's personality and ideology simultaneously tapped into the longings of German youth for both paternal protection and maternal care.

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Since there really is no history, only historians, each with a point of view, a polemicist might argue that all history is psychohistory, in that it involves the unconscious and conscious mind of the historian. Loewenberg addresses political conflict, ideological formation, and the apparently illogical contradictions with such an historical consciousness. In this sense, his psychohistory is profoundly modern, profoundly in touch with the temper of our post-Freudian era.

DAVID JAMES FISHER

DAMNED FOR LOOKING BACK

STATION ISLAND. By Seamus Heaney. Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. $11.95.

Seamus Heaney's newest collection of poems opens with an Orphean love poem. Retracing his steps back to a honeymoon scene in the London underground, the poet finds himself alone, trains gone:

> the wet track
> Bared and tensed as I am, all attention
> For your step following and damned if I look back.

In a book in which so many poems, including the title sequence, are intentionally Orphic acts of looking back, it's as if Heaney has damned himself in advance. Though the book is explicitly Dantesque, especially the purgatorial pilgrimage of "Station Island," Orpheus seems an equally informing spirit. For *Station Island* is largely a troubled meditation on the poet's role and sources, a descent to an inferno of personal and literary dead, and an ascent, afterward, in the lyric figure of the legendary mad Irish King Sweeney, cursed for his irreverence by being turned into a bird. Heaney emerges in Part Three of the book a freer poet, but a scarred one; his persona Sweeney has lost kingdom, family, and sanity in exchange for his vision.

The poems in Part One are the book's only miscellaneous ones; they include the frankly erotic, interesting ruminations over totem objects, tender poems to Heaney's children, and documentations of his usual political concerns. They are graced with the qualities one

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looks forward to in Heaney—bold, supple rhythms, slant rhymes, and a rich commingling of the colloquial and metaphoric. "The Birthplace," set at Thomas Hardy's home, is especially striking. Juxtaposed to Hardy's spartan solitude, "the deal table where he wrote, so small and plain,/the single bed a dream of discipline," poet and wife, likened to one "of his troubled pairs," end up in the nearby woods:

> where we made an episode
> of ourselves, unforgettable,
> unmentionable,
>
> and broke out again like cattle
> through bushes, wet and raised,
> only yards from the house.

On their return, the familiarities of home become "unstacked iron weights/afloat among galaxies." The earlier, tense division between artistic and domestic callings is healed, just as art and reality unite in the poem's conclusion—Heaney wondrously recalls staying up all night to finish *The Return of the Native*, and how his own world returned to him afterward:

> The corncrake in the aftergrass
>
> verified himself, and I heard
> roosters and dogs, the very same
> as if he had written them.

His own life survives comparison, is confirmed as source, "verified."

Other poems in Part One reassert Heaney's guilt as artist in war-torn Ireland, a frequent theme since his volume, *North*. In "Sandstone Keepsake," he alludes to the *Inferno* to convict himself of virtual connivance with the British, portraying himself as a beachcomber in sight of a camp for IRA prisoners, luxuriating in a "free state of image and allusion," a self-imposed exile from the Northern strife, resident of the so-called Irish "Free State" (the Republic), an aesthete "not about to set times wrong or right." In other poems, the burden is not so much to act politically as to speak for his unspoken-for peasant countrymen. This is beautifully rendered in "The Loaning" where wind in the hedges becomes "the limbo of lost words" flown "from raftered sheds and crossroads/from the shelter of gable ends and turned-up carts." In one of those loving descriptions at which Heaney

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excels, the mute are seen sitting in a "womanless kitchen" taking "the twilight as it came/like solemn trees," their pipes "red in their mouths, the talk come down/to *Aye* and *Aye* again." Heaney's sense of identity with them is keen:

> When you are tired or terrified
> your voice slips back into its old first place
> and makes the sound your shades make there . . .

These Orphic forays into old first places are typically strained. In "Making Strange," the poet goes back to his home (rural) territory with a sophisticated friend and is caught between his native and learned voices. His compromise:

> I found myself driving the stranger
>
> through my own country, adept
> at dialect, reciting my pride
> in all that I knew, that began to make strange
> at that same recitation.

To turn back and name is, ironically, to distance and lose.

Heaney's worried looking back, his guilty struggle for his poetic place and voice, dominates the central twelve-part sequence, "Station Island." On a pilgrimage to Ireland's fearsome penitential island on Lough Derg, Heaney proceeds, guideless, and meets his dead, most of whom either challenge his personal and artistic integrity or harangue him. Perhaps he should have followed the advice of the first shade he met, "Sabbath-breaker" Simon Sweeney (a precursor of the liberating Sweeney of Part Three): "Stay clear of all processions!" What Heaney really meets here, of course, are his own doubts and regrets from which he seeks release. The subject of the elegy "The Strand at Lough Beg" (in the earlier *Field Work*) accuses him of having "saccharined my death." "You confused evasion and artistic tact," the shade condemns. "You whitewashed ugliness and drew/the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio*." But this self-accusation is a bit indulgent, for what is Heaney doing here but the same thing, casting his meditations and elegies into a Dantesque scheme which risks deflecting their raw emotional centers, absorbing them into a frame which unfortunately seems more convenient than apt. There are beautiful poems here; the elegy to a sectarian murder victim in Section VII is especially

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riveting. Yet one can't help in the end but feel the pilgrim's journey contrived, programmatic. And one also begins to weary of Heaney's obsessive guilt. Fortunately, the poems tell us, he has wearied of it too. The last few sections of "Station Island" and Part Three of the book constitute a purposeful departure.

Heaney is wisely cautious in announcing this poetic self-transformation. Berating himself at the end of Section IX of the poem, he bemoans the possibilities of change: "As if the cairnstone could defy the cairn./As if the eddy could reform the pool." Yet he finds a moving image of faith on which to conclude that section: "Then I thought of the tribe whose dances never fail./For they keep dancing till they sight the deer." The cycle's final say goes to the shade of Joyce who dismisses Heaney's pilgrimage and lectures, "Don't be so earnest." Now that "the English language/belongs to us," Joyce declares:

> it's time to swim
> out on your own and fill the element
> with signatures on your own frequency.

"Let go/let fly," Joyce insists (under Heaney's pen).

Heaney takes this last advice to himself literally as he casts the final part of the book in the voice of the condemned bird-man Sweeney. Damned, crazed, but lyrically released, Sweeney is a kind of Lear, exposed, pushed to the limits of his voice, or Orpheus after he's looked back, maddened, free of illusions and earthly bonds. "I am haggard, womanless,/and cut off from music," Sweeney describes himself in Heaney's translation of the medieval tale, *Sweeney Astray*. In his introduction to it, Heaney makes clear his affinity to the bird-man: "Insofar as Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance, it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political, and domestic obligations."

These poems in Part Three, written as glosses while Heaney worked on his translation, answer the struggles of "Station Island." Shorter-lined, unbridled lyrics of "neuter allegiance," they are among the best in the book. In a number of poems, he is explicit about his new, freed stance as writer, and he captures well the pain of his isolation. In a heartrending echo of the original tale, "Sweeney's Return" shows the poet flying to the sill of his bedroom window to discover his wife's desertion:

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Where had she gone? Beyond
the tucked and level bed, I floundered
in my wild reflection in the mirror.

As he asserts at the end of "The King of the Ditchbacks":

And I saw myself
rising to move in that dissimulation,
. . . .

a rich young man

leaving everything he had
for a migrant solitude.

This is Heaney's poetic intention, with all its personal, artistic, and political ramifications. Self-damned, self-absolved, he is, as he says, well "vested for this calling."

DEBORAH TALL

DWIGHT MACDONALD

A CRITICAL AMERICAN: THE POLITICS OF DWIGHT MACDONALD. By Stephen Whitfield. Archon Books. $19.50.

Writing about Dwight Macdonald is a daunting task. How, one must wonder, given Macdonald's famed ability to deliver a verbal bullet to the brain, would one's own work fare under his withering criticisms? But Stephen Whitfield, an historian at Brandeis University and already the author of a carefully wrought, critically sympathetic analysis of Hannah Arendt's concept of totalitarianism, seems well suited for the task. But the historical scrutiny to which he subjected *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* is largely absent from *A Critical American: The Politics of Dwight Macdonald.*

The structure of the book takes its cue from William Phillips's comment that "to understand Macdonald one has to understand the way he reflected or reacted to the ideas around him and to the people who held them." But in walking the reader through the numerous

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phases of Macdonald's life—a life whose swirling variations could be compared to a Jackson Pollock canvas—Whitfield adds very little to what has been written already about Macdonald's extraordinary intellectual career. A graduate of Exeter and Yale, Macdonald began his career in intellectual journalism with *Fortune.* His work there came to end in 1936 in what was to become characteristic fashion, when his series of articles savaging the United States Steel Corporation in a magazine for businessmen ended with a climactic quotation from Lenin's *Imperialism.* A convert to Trotskyism, he went on to become a major contributor to *Partisan Review* into the war years, until he broke with both, as well as with the allied war effort, in the name of an ill-defined mixture of anarchism and pacifism. It was as the founder and editor of *Politics* in the early postwar years that Macdonald came into his glory. The magazine provided a voice for a number of as yet little-known writers, such as Paul Goodman, C. Wright Mills, and Nicola Chiaromonte, who were searching for a humanist and anti-statist alternative to Marxism. When *Politics* collapsed in the late forties, Macdonald gave up on both *Politics* and politics. Writing primarily for *The New Yorker* in the 1950s, Macdonald turned to film and cultural criticism, where his rhetorical talents and blend of anarchist and aristocratic instincts produced a running critique of mass culture.

In telling this story, Whitfield gives the reader the standard picture of Macdonald the engaging controversialist, the "systematically unsystematic thinker," who was "never able to write a book in cold blood." We learn that as a Trotskyist, this heretic among heretics chose James Joyce as his party name. When Trotsky complained that "everyone has the right to be stupid, but Comrade Macdonald abuses the privilege," an unflustered Macdonald replied that Trotsky "seems to be more interested in defending Leninism than in learning from his mistakes." It was one of Macdonald's great strengths that he was willing to learn from his, willing to break, for instance, with pacifism, in the face of Soviet power. It is unfortunate then that Whitfield, the author of the book on Hannah Arendt, literally ignores Macdonald's role in the controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* He never even tries to explain why this man, who so often had been willing to change his mind when confronted by the evidence, resolutely stuck to his guns even as the factual basis of Arendt's argument was demolished. Was it personal? Did it relate to the concordance of their ideas about the evils of mass society? Or did it reflect what Mary McCarthy saw as a Jewish-Gentile split over the book?

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Similarly, it's odd that Whitfield, writing about Macdonald to discuss larger themes, fails to consider the puzzling reasons for Macdonald's harsh and impatient 1952 review (in *Partisan Review*) of C. Wright Mills's *White Collar*, a subject discussed at some length in Irving Louis Horowitz's illuminating biography of Mills. On the face of it, Macdonald, who loved to *épater les bourgeois*, should have been sympathetic to the book's unremitting disdain for middle-class life. Was he simply weary and impatient with Marxist theorizing, annoyed by Mills's humorless, abstracted didacticism? Or, as Dennis Wrong suggests, was there something more profound at work? Mills's critique of the "salariat" was considered pathbreaking at the time. But it may have been far less original than it appeared. To someone like Macdonald who was intimately familiar with the 1930s and 1940s Marxist debates on, in Wrong's words, whether the "salariat" would join the proletariat, the book may have seemed like old hat. Looking back on the review twenty-two years later, Macdonald tied the harshness of *White Collar* to Mills's later ardor for Castro. Mills's "stuff," he said, "became rather *too* clear, and one-sided, for my taste: i.e., he judged capitalist America with a severity he didn't apply to socialist competitors like Castro's Cuba." "The double standard," Macdonald went on, "is as unattractive in politics as in sex."

It appears that Whitfield closed his eyes to these questions—the quote on Mills is readily available in Macdonald's 1974 collection *Discriminations: Essays and Afterthoughts, 1938-1974*—because they undermine the book's meager rationale. That rationale, as becomes apparent only in the penultimate chapter, "The New Left's Ancestral Voice," is to claim Macdonald as forefather of the sixties. This is peculiar, not because the idea is odd, but because it is so obvious—when Macdonald edited *Politics*, James Burnham accused him of "a program of revolution in one psyche"—and because the delineation has been repeatedly elaborated, most notably in Richard King's *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom*, written more than a decade ago.

The chapter on the New Left is a genealogical exercise. Whitfield rocks back and forth, noting the similarities and differences between Macdonald's "personalism" developed in his *Politics* years, his hostility to established authority (he urged the readers of *Politics* to "get the national state before it gets us"), and the ideas of Tom Hayden, Staughton Lynd, and Noam Chomsky. Whitfield is wrong when he tries to filter Chomsky's and Macdonald's larger views through the

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Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Williams, Moore, MacLeish, Auden, Jeffers, Cummings, Shapiro, Schwartz, Jarrell, Lowell, Merrill, Thomas, Nemerov, Ashbery, Hecht, Kunitz, Plath, Hall, Ammons, Bishop, Hollander, Meredith, Berryman, Wagoner, Snyder, Van Duyn, Kumin, Wright, Ignatow, Atwood, Pinsky, Dubie, Raab, and Bottoms have something in common.

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prism of their shared hostility to the Vietnam War: they were co-founders of Resist. Whitfield is wide of the mark when he tries to draw an analogy between Macdonald's mocking the "LibLabs" of the Henry Wallace campaign and Chomsky's assault on the Kennedy technocrats, men who were openly disdainful of the "softheaded Lib-Labs." Whitfield soft-pedals Chomsky's apologetics for Japan's World War Two barbarism and fails to mention the Faurisson affair except by referring to Chomsky's "mildly perverse interpretation of World War Two." Can we imagine Macdonald, antinationalist that he was, the critic of Trotsky and bureaucratic collectivism, serving, as has Chomsky, as an apologist for the North Vietnamese and Pol Pot? Macdonald repeatedly changed his position in the face of new facts; Chomsky, driven by an irrational hatred for America as the sole source of evil in the world, has tried to change the facts in order to hold on to his position.

Meyer Schapiro once wrote to Macdonald, "A prophet, dear Dwight, is not judged, like a ballplayer by his batting average, but rather by the impact of his expressed convictions on people's thinking and acting. And in that sense, you yourself were for a time a prophet." A compelling consideration of the prophet and his prophecies awaits another author and another book.

FRED SIEGEL

MARXIST DILEMMAS

MARXISM AND MORALITY. By Steven Lukes. Oxford University Press. $15.95.

Academic life is littered with large books on small subjects —warmed-over theses grinding away like the mills of God, slowly reducing some tiny issue to intellectual dust. *Marxism and Morality* is just the opposite, a brisk little book on a very large topic. If it isn't the last word on its subject, it is certainly one of the best. Steven Lukes takes off from a familiar paradox. Marx was bitterly hostile to "ethical socialism"; he denounced Proudhon's appeals to "eternal justice"; he told the authors of the Gotha program that their talk of rights was

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"obsolete verbal rubbish"; his socialism was not an "ideal to be realized" but a question of what was already slumbering in the womb of bourgeois society. Yet, his reaction to the misery, squalor, and oppression of capitalism can be only described as moral outrage. "It is plain that Marx was fired by outrage and indignation and the burning desire for a better world that it is hard not to see as moral." Why did he load *Capital* with all those descriptions of overworked seamstresses, exhausted signalmen, expropriated smallholders, if not to excite the same moral outrage in the reader? But, if morality is somehow "prescientific," what was moral outrage doing there? How could Marx simultaneously think that "morality" was nonsense and spend forty years as the scathing moral critic he undoubtedly was?

It's an old question, and it leads to two others—how far has Marxism lived up to its own standards in practice? And have the cruelties and crimes of Stalinism and its heirs been partly caused by the confusions bequeathed by Marx? Lukes's gloomy answer is that even when we make all possible allowances for the way in which communists have fought against fascism and have taken the lead in opposing right-wing violations of human rights, the practical record of Marxism is terrible. He is particularly scathing about the way Merleau-Ponty and Sartre positively wallowed in the thought that Stalin's brutalities might be warranted by history, but he has no time for those who think of their opponents as historically dispensable.

Many critics have thought that it was Marx's utopianism which caused this kind of moral damage—Popper's dictum, that all attempts to create heaven on earth create hell on earth instead, sums up a whole school of thought. It has often been said that a theory which expects a brutalized working class to rise in violent revolt and create a society free from coercion, deceit, and disorder is a millenarian fantasy, not social science. Thirty years ago, Norman Cohn showed in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* where such fantasies lead. Thomas Munzer's reign of terror in sixteenth-century Münster was a prefiguring of Stalin's. Marxism replaces religion only in the alarming sense that it feeds the chiliastic longings that religion feeds.

Lukes only partly shares this view of the source of the trouble. Mostly, he sides with anarchist critics of Marxism like Victor Serge and with socialist contemporaries like Rudolf Bahro. What is wrong with official Marxism is its brutal instrumentalism; the contempt for human rights which Marxist regimes display in practice is based in a theory which has been reduced to Plekhanov's slogan of "salus revo-

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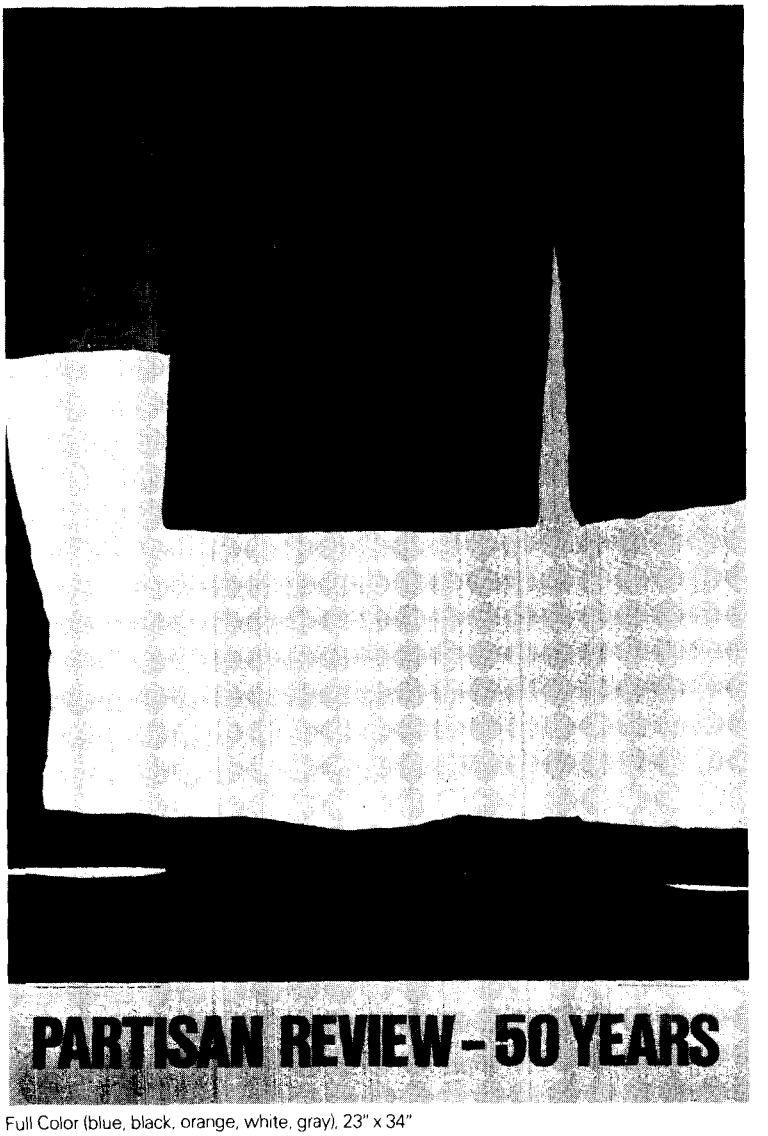

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lutionis suprema lex"—whatever promotes the progress of the revolution is morally right. This simply abolishes political morality. It's not even Machiavellianism, for Machiavelli readily acknowledged that lying, meanness, and violence were immoral and thought that the tragedy of politics lay in the fact that wickedness was sometimes necessary. Marxist instrumentalism is repulsive because it treats everyone and everything only as a means to a distant end. It cannot handle the thought that people who have been betrayed or injured have been wronged, and that the benefits eventually going to others cannot compensate them. Utopianism adds an hysterical overtone to this ugly utilitarianism, but it is the ugly, utilitarian character of official Marxism that Lukes insists on.

So Lukes argues that when Marx denounces exploitation as "robbery" and yet points out that when the capitalist hires a laborer he gets no more than he's entitled to, he isn't invoking a Marxist view of justice. Marx was pointing out that in a social order as riddled with contradictions as capitalism was, any appeal to "justice" yields contradictions too. The achievement of justice was no part of Marx's ideals. The ideal was the creation of a society in which man controls both nature and the productive process, where free creation replaces constrained labor. The abolition of exploitation is a precondition of that goal—but the goal itself is freedom. In practice, Marx's unconcern about rights turned out to be disastrous, because he and his followers chronically underestimated the temptations of the exercise of power; philosophically, it's defensible enough, for it mostly amounts to a demolition of doctrines of natural rights, and contains nothing a pupil of Bentham would have flinched at.

That Marx was not interested in "justice" seems plain; what's distinctive in Marx is his conception of freedom, which unites a romantic passion for creativity and a rationalist passion for an uncoerced orderliness. All this Lukes gets right—and some very distinguished commentators on Marx chronically get it wrong. The one gap in Lukes's account is that he doesn't explain just how Marx could have thought that in attacking part of morality, he was attacking morality as such; that, of course, leaves it rather mysterious that Marx really espoused a morality of freedom and emancipation but thought it wasn't a morality at all. There is an answer—if not a simple one. It lies in Marx's belief that once religion, politics, and morality had lost their grip, we should be left with the single idea of "the practical." The desire for freedom was "practical" in the same way as the desire

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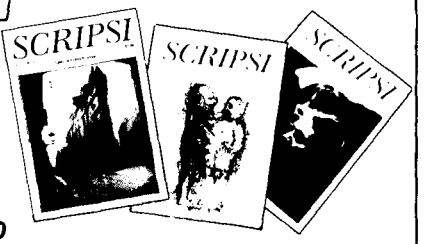

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to eat well, sleep soundly, and live in good health; disease is an evil, but not a moral evil; freedom is a good, but not a moral good. Marx's outrage at the disorder and oppression of capitalism is—in Marx's own terms—like the surgeon's outrage at malignancy; it is outrage all right, but not moral outrage.

ALAN RYAN

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